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### A Collaborative Sermon Preparation Team at the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church of Vancouver, WA

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ABSTRACT

A COLLABORATIVE SERMON PREPARATION TEAM AT THE  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST COMMUNITY  
CHURCH OF VANCOUVER, WA

by

Roger Walter

Advisers: Kenley D. Hall

# ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A COLLABORATIVE SERMON PREPARATION TEAM AT THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST COMMUNITY CHURCH OF VANCOUVER, WA

Name of researcher: Roger D. Walter

Name and degree of advisors: Kenley D. Hall, DMin

Date Completed: July 2012

## Problem

Research (Rainer, 2001) indicates that people come back to church because of the sermon. Additionally, it is argued (Anderson, 2006) that the church and culture have changed. People today have higher expectations of the quality of what happens. Therefore, the expectation is much higher for the quality of a sermon. Yet, the sermon development process is still traditionally a private and closed system involving the pastor alone. This underutilizes a resource of creative people who could assist the pastor with research, writing, creativity, reflection and evaluation of the manuscript and graphics.

## Method

In this study I sought to lay a theological foundation of the value of utilizing

various people's giftedness. A careful study of 1 Cor 12-14 was completed with this prospect in mind and this extended passage shows that teamwork is an important aspect of the church as members work together according to their giftedness. This brings about a unity and diversity discussion which should ultimately benefit the church.

Furthermore, a thorough review of the literature was done focusing first on what a collaborative sermon preparation team is, why various people choose to create sermons in this manner, how different groups choose to collaborate around the message building and finally, what are the pros and cons. It was shown that most preachers use a simple form of collaboration with nothing else but the use of commentaries. This part of the study showed some well-thought-out methods for improving this collaborative effect.

I developed a collaborative sermon preparation team from regular attenders in the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church. This team consisted of four people who had theology degrees, another who studied theology in school, an attorney with gifts toward evangelism, a female elder who is also a regular speaker, a lady who has written three books and another lady with gifts toward evangelism and outreach. This team met for seven weeks and developed four sermons. They created a collaborative process.

This study was evaluated by a qualitative focus group approach to collecting data. All the people on the focus groups attended a minimum of three of the four sermons preached at the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church of Vancouver, WA.

The sermon preparation team also participated in a short quantitative survey measuring what they felt the outcome of the process was to how well it came together in the week-to-week. The questions were structured to compare the project's sermon series against the previous works that I preached.

They evaluated the process as well as their input and participation in the project. I also made qualitative observations about the process. I did not use a comparison group for this methodology.

## Results

The purpose of this project was to develop a method of sermon preparation that not only supported the work of the pastor, but also made the preached message clearer because of the talented focus team using their gifts towards this goal. It was designed to take the sermon preparation out of the pastor's study and get it into the hands of a team of people who would not only strengthen the material, but also the actual preaching of the sermons as well.

The results of this process was that we formed a team of nine people who met for eight weeks to develop a four-part sermon series. We met weekly together at the church and during the remainder of the week we met online. Only two members met with us online.

Each weekly meeting was spent developing the up coming three sermons. We brainstormed the appropriate texts for the most distant sermon – the one three weeks away. Then we crafted the outline of the sermon coming up in two weeks. And we poured over the manuscript of the coming week's sermon.

## Conclusions

In the end, this project did produce better than normal messages. The model we used, however, was too intense for the collaborative team to make it a perpetual part of the sermon preparation process. However, one of the strongest things we discovered was

that the amount of time we actually put into preparing for the message – in the study part, that is the reading and reseaching -- actually makes the writing of the material flows very smoothly.

But true to our goals, we did find that a crew of talented individuals contributing their gifts to a callaborative writing task, were able to be supportive players in the team equation of sermon preparation. With some tweaking, this could be a model for small churches who share a pastor, or for large congregations seeking to improve their overall message.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A COLLABORATIVE SERMON PREPARATION TEAM AT THE  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST COMMUNITY  
CHURCH OF VANCOUVER, WA

A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Roger Walter

July 2012



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Skip Bell

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Date approved

## DEDICATION

The project document is dedicated to my wife and seven children, to show them that I actually did finish and that “discipline will get us where we want to go.”

It is also dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; may this be useful to grow the kingdom for your cause.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Personal History .....	1
Purpose .....	3
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Justification for the Project.....	4
Expectations for the Project.....	4
Delimitations .....	5
Limitations .....	5
Definition of Terms .....	6
Methodology.....	7
2. A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF 1 COR 12-14 .....	8
Introduction .....	8
Unity .....	10
Four Bonds of Unity.....	12
We Confess the Same Lord.....	13
We Depend on the Same God .....	13
We Minister to the Same Body .....	14
We Have the Same Baptism.....	14
Diversity .....	15
Chapter 13 .....	18
Chapter 14 .....	21
Applied Theology in the Ministry Context.....	25
Conclusion .....	30
3. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	32
Collaborative Sermon Preparation .....	32
What is it? .....	33
Why Do it? .....	36
How Do We Do it? .....	41
What Are the Pros and Cons.....	49

4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION .....	53
Beginning the Collaborative Approach .....	53
What Could the Team do for me?.....	55
What Could the Team not do for me? .....	57
Constructing the Team.....	59
Training the Team.....	60
Exegetical Training .....	60
Online Tools Training.....	61
5. ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT .....	69
Effects on the Preacher .....	70
Effects on the Congregation .....	74
Effects on the Collaborative Team .....	76
Recommendations .....	84
Conclusions .....	85
Appendix	
A. SERMONS .....	89
B. TIME CARD.....	119
C. SURVEY INSTRUMENTS.....	122
D. FOCUS GROUP .....	127
REFERENCE LIST .....	138
VITA .....	143

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Time Spent on Sermons .....	74
2. Where Team Spent Time .....	78
3. Team Process – Self Scored .....	80
4. Team Involvement .....	81
5. Group Involvement .....	83

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Table 1 First Sermon Time Card .....	119
2. Table 2 Second Sermon Time Card.....	119
3. Table 3 Third Sermon Time Card .....	120
4. Table 4 Fourth Sermon Time Card.....	120
5. Table 5 Average Time Card for Each Sermon.....	121

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project has been in the works for five years. Along those five years, many people have helped contribute to this project document either by their actual input or their emotional support of me.

First, I would like to thank my wife, Gail. In the 24 years we have been married, she has likely never seen me work on a project with this much dedication, this much persistence and all the while needing this much encouragement to keep going. Thank you Gail for reading, editing, and prompting me to keep working on this project. Thanks for listening to me, helping me think through it and most of all your constant encouragement that I really could do this. I could not have done this and stayed with it, if it were not for you.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my children for listening to me, putting up with my ranting about not liking to write papers, and for those wonderful cross-country drives jammed into the Suburban together as we attended class at Southern, Andrews and Oakwood. Of my kids, I would especially like to thank my daughter, Krista, for being the team secretary, for typing other parts of this for me and for comparing who has the worst papers to write.

I would also like to thank my collaborative team who made this all possible: Jeff, Danny, Dave, Ginny, Dave, Todd, Terri and (again) Gail. Thank you for the time you dedicated to this project and helping me craft four quality sermons that showed we can all use our gifts to the benefit of the congregation. I cannot wait to do it again!

To the Focus Group members, Thank you for the time on that evening and especially to Craig who led out on that team and helped to decipher the comments and

keep them on track. Tammy, thank you for taking the notes that evening.

My cohort group of Bob, Steve, Gamal, Erick, BJ and Geoff has been a tremendous source of inspiration and support. Thanks for the new friendships guys and for making the process fun also.

To Loren Siebold, you got me started on this and helped me think through some of the preliminary reading and planning for this project. Thanks for the first two years as my advisor.

Next, I would like to thank Kenley and Don. You read, reread and kept on encouraging me to keep going and keep writing. Kenley, your precision in writing and your understanding of the process has been invaluable. Don, your inspiration to make me an “exact man” has been a never-ending source of help as I keep on writing. You both have been tremendous in advising me to do this right.

Finally, I would like to thank my two churches during the course of this process. The Adventure in Windsor, CO and the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church in Vancouver, WA, have both inspired me, challenged me and put up with me during this process. Thank you for being great churches to serve.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Personal History**

The first time I walked into a church for anything other than a wedding was when I was 12 years old. I remember being pretty lost during the church service, but the preacher captivated my attention. After my baptism along with my family, later that same year, I felt the call to ministry. My journey of playing baseball was immediately interrupted with this call to ministry.

I was not completely sure where that call was taking me, but I had a vague sense of seeking to make the gospel message as clear as possible to people who were like me. I was not raised in church, so I did not know what the term “Lamb of God” meant. I had no idea what grace was, except a long prayer before we ate Thanksgiving dinner. I remember showing up for church early in my experience and hearing an older lady calling another older lady a dork. I was shocked! It was much later I understood what Dorcas meant, or the Community Services Center.

The journey to help people understand the clear message of the gospel without all the confusing lingo and tradition led me on a multi-faceted journey to plant a church. The church we planted in Northern Colorado had a singular mandate: to be evangelistic at its forefront and to reach people with the message of the gospel in a language they would understand without the extra lingo.

At a very early age in my church experience the leaders of the congregation got

me involved in working in the church and in my community. Without knowing it, they were utilizing my spiritual gifts even as a young teen. This experience of involvement via my giftedness has followed me over the years as I helped to shape the culture of churches to encourage members to use their gifts also. Part of my ministry has focused on getting members involved in the duties of the church and working for the benefit of the community by employing their giftedness in much the same fashion I was allowed to as a youngster. Yet, I realized that the one place we did not let people get involved—except when the preacher was out of town—was with the sermon. However, when I visited Community Christian Church in Naperville, IL, and saw their sermon process—of creating each and every sermon with a team—I realized clearly for the first time that this was one way to get more people using their gifts in the process of creating the message. I returned home determined that this was a better option and could actually aid me in my weak spots in sermon preparation.

Furthermore, I was pastoring a church plant which was unique in style and structure. We were the first multi-site Adventist church; one church with two locations. We adopted this methodology primarily because we saw people unwilling to bring their friends further than 15 minutes away. Therefore, rather than creating a second service on site, we created a second campus closer to more people.

It was our understanding that the weekly sermon was the one primary vision-casting tool which helped the two campuses not sub-divide into separate churches with differing visions. Because of that philosophical issue, my associates and I all attended both services each week. This meant the speaker spoke at both campuses each week. Therefore, this idea of a sermon preparation team would allow each of us to have a hand

in creating the same sermon, owning its message and preaching with a different speaker at each site. Thus, the journey began as I sought a way to build a collaborative sermon preparation team.

Before that concept was fully in place, my associates and I all moved. Yet, after the move, I realized that this project must continue on even though I am not preaching on multiple campuses anymore. It became apparent that the real reason to proceed with this concept is not just logistics, but more importantly, it is about the spiritual aspects of a collaborative team using the spiritual gifts of its members.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop, implement and evaluate a sermon preparation system that opens up the sermon development process to additional input from people who are in local membership at the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church of Vancouver, WA, utilizing online tools and face-to-face meetings. The idea was to build a collaborative sermon preparation team using many gifts to strengthen the sermon and make for a more meaningful and lasting impact on the membership as they listen.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research (Rainer, 2001) indicates that people come back to church because of the sermon. Additionally, it is argued (Anderson, 2006) that the church and culture have changed. People today have higher expectations on the quality of what happens. Therefore, the expectation is much higher for the quality of a sermon. Yet, the sermon development process is still traditionally a private and closed system involving the pastor alone. This underutilizes a resource of creative people who could assist the pastor with

research, writing, creativity, reflection and evaluation of the manuscript and graphics.

### **Justification for the Project**

Mega churches and media-based ministries provide online forums and other places, where people have the opportunity to contribute to the sermon preparation. It has been shown that sermons that have been callaborated on and revised by many writers are better sermons because of this process. Similar effort would enhance the development of Sabbath morning messages. If Rainer is correct, as stated above, that the primary reason people return to church is because of the sermon, limiting this all-important task to a single person whose time is already stretched thin, short-changes the opportunity, importance and effectiveness of the task.

America is a culture which has an increasing intolerance for anything not done at a professional level. However, there is a tendency for the preacher to protect the sermon process and not allow or appreciate any intrusion into this world for reflection and evaluation. Yet, multiple people adding to the clarity and content of the message enhances the actual communication of it to the people of the congregation.

This project helped me to open up the task of bringing the biblical world and the congregational world together (Tisdale, 1997). Greater input from more people helps enliven the impact on the congregation's lives.

### **Expectations for the Project**

This project helped me create a preaching model to advance the kingdom growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church of Vancouver, WA. Additionally, this project helped me to transform the people who were part of the team by making them

better biblical students, better communicators and better listeners to sermons.

This project should deepen the quality of messages at our church, as well as increase their effectiveness in the lives of those listening to the sermons. It also helped develop my preparedness for the preaching moment by forcing me to be more disciplined about my preparation.

It is my continued expectation that this project will provide a potential model for other pastors who wish to make a greater impact on their community through their preaching ministry. In addition, I expected that a collaborative team would contribute by providing additional thought and material to the speaker and pastor.

### **Delimitations**

This research took place at the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church of Vancouver, WA. It involved people on the sermon preparation team who were active, participating members in this church. These people were all asked to attend a minimum of three of the four sermons.

This study did not do a longitudinal study over many months, or longer. It did not address the long-term issues as related to keeping a team motivated and together over the course of a year, five years, or longer.

### **Limitations**

Measuring the success or failure of any sermon, or even a small grouping of sermons is fairly subjective. Yet, this research attempted to measure the project sermons ability to connect with its intended audience through a focus group who listened to the messages. This could be skewed in favor or opposed to the messages based on the focus

group individuals' relationship with the speaker. We sought to limit that by generating a well-rounded focus group as well as gathering a leader of that focus group who would keep digging for deeper meaning.

Conducting a study of four sermons over a 7-week basis can only measure that particular process. However, it is limited in its effect on projecting whether this process could work as a long-term strategy. I sought to build into the process several ways in which this could be measured and supported.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Collaborate.* This study uses the word collaborate, or variances of it to express the idea of people working with one another. It is about cooperating on the work of the sermon preparation (Collaborate, 2009).

*Message.* The terms message and sermon are used interchangeably in this document.

*Spiritual Gifts.* As it relates to this study, a spiritual gift is the use of talents or abilities in the service of God. It is also using these gifts towards the advancement of the message preparation. Gifts specifically listed in 1 Cor 12-14 which could relate to this project are: wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, interpretation, apostleship, administration, teaching and speaking.

*Huddle Group.* This phrase is used in chapter 5 to define the group that utilized the online collaboration process alone to support the weekly message.

*Live Group.* This phrase is used in chapter 5 to define the group that met on a weekly basis to collaborate and support the message.

## **Methodology**

In this study I sought to lay a theological foundation of the value of utilizing various people's giftedness. A careful study of 1 Cor 12-14 was completed and this extended passage shows that teamwork is an important aspect of the church as members work together according to their giftedness. This brings about a unity and diversity discussion which should ultimately benefit the church.

Furthermore, a thorough review of the literature was done focusing first on what a collaborative sermon preparation team is, why various people choose to create sermons in this manner, how different groups choose to collaborate around the message building and finally, what are the pros and cons. It was shown that most preachers use a simple form of collaboration with nothing else but the use of commentaries. This part of the study showed some well-thought-out methods for improving this collaborative effect.

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The sermon preparation team also participated in a short quantitative survey measuring what they felt the outcome of the process was and how well it came together in the week-to-week. They evaluated the process as well as their input and participation in the project.

I also made qualitative observations about the process. I did not use a comparison group for this methodology.



## CHAPTER 2

### A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF 1 COR 12-14

#### **Introduction**

It's been said (Rainer, 2001) that people choose to come back to church primarily for the message that is preached. They may choose to come because of the music, the facility, or even the programming, but they return because of the message. The other aspects either support the message, or they don't. However the message still holds primacy.

Additionally, it is argued (Anderson, 2006) that the church and culture have changed. Therefore, the expectation is much higher to produce a quality message from week-to-week. Traditionally, the sermon development process is a private and closed system involving the pastor alone. This underutilizes a resource of creative people who could assist the pastor with research, writing, creativity, reflection and evaluation of the manuscript and graphics.

Redhat (2009), suggests that, "Innovation thrives in open environments where everyone is allowed to share knowledge and work together toward common goals. My idea may not work. But it could spark your idea that will." It means doing things better because we do it together. It seems to me that this could and should be true of the church also.

It is this thought that drives me to understand how I can become a better

communicator of the gospel through a collaborative sermon preparation team. In order to build a theological foundation for this project the collaborative themes that are found in 1 Cor 12-14 will be explored.

### **Unity**

The word “collaborate” comes from two words: labor and together (Collaborate, 2009). 1 Cor 12-14 provides a complete overview of how individuals come together with the tools they have to work together to accomplish the greater picture. In these passages we see a description of spiritual gifts in chapter 12, the glue that holds them together in chapter 13, and how they function as part of the body as they work together in chapter 14. There is a connecting link to bring all three chapters together. In 1 Cor 12:31, Paul begins with the word, ζηλοῦτε, This could be translated as “zealous, or earnestly,” which most translations do. After saying that he wishes for his readers to earnestly desire certain gifts, he goes on to the root of the problem in Corinth, the issue of love. After finishing that chapter Paul jumps into chapter 14:1 with the same word, ζηλοῦτε. “There is a definite continuity in the development of thought prevails as Paul moves from chapter 12, to 13 and then resumes his discussion of gifts in chapter 14” (McDougall, 2003).

McDougall suggest that if a church were to function according to 1 Cor 13, there would be no guesses or frustrations over the proper use of gifts. This connects to the concept of unity.

The description of gifts in chapter 12 is primarily highlighted by the concept of unity versus uniformity. Thompson (1988) points out that believers have always had to stress that they could work together and live together, even if they didn’t see eye-to-eye

on every aspect. This then, is the difference between unity and uniformity. Unity involves tackling a common goal (Unity, 2009). Uniformity, on the other hand is defined as the quality of sameness or homogeneity (Uniformity, 2009).

People in general tend to think of unity as being equated with uniformity. In other words, the expectation is that if you agree with me and we want to be in unity, we must look, act, and be the same. I disagree with this common analysis.

The example I use to explain my disagreement is when snowflakes fall, they fall in unity. Yet, when snowflakes are examined under the microscope there are no two that are uniform to the next. Unity without uniformity is the key to understanding this passage. The other analogy is a sports team. No two individuals play the same position. Each has their own function, and for the good of the team, they must work together. That's unity, but not uniformity.

The Apostle Paul addresses considerable misunderstanding among the Corinthian church as to why there is a necessity and work for people who may appear vastly different. One gets the idea, from the lengthy amount of time which Paul gives this subject, that the very thing which was supposed to give more unity, was clearly causing them more disunity (Nichol, 1978). It seems they simply didn't understand the difference between unity and uniformity.

There are a number of themes in this section of scripture which bring out the idea of unity and working together. Some of these themes are important to trace the apostle's thought and the interpretation of this passage (Richards, 1987).

Even though the various gifts signify a difference (Richards, 1987), there are three common elements. The first is that these gifts signify the Holy Spirit's presence. The

second is they are given for the common good. Finally, they are determined by the Holy Spirit.

The not-so-subtle implication here is that the Holy Spirit is the one in charge and will provide just what is needed as He sees fit. It cannot be argued that others should be the same or act differently, if it was the Holy Spirit who designed them in the first place. This comes back to the idea of collaboration as presented above by the Redhat Linux website. It's working together for a common goal and is working together to find the best answer possible. Quoting Fee, McDougall (2003) says:

To illustrate the thesis of v. 7 Paul proceeds to offer a sizable list of ways in which the Spirit is manifested in the Christian assembly. Because this is the first of several such listings of "gifts" in the Pauline corpus, considerable interest has been generated over this passage in terms of the nature and meaning of the various gifts themselves.' But, as he goes on to say, 'That lies outside of Paul's own interest which is simply to illustrate the diversity of the Spirit's activities/manifestations in the church.

Praat (2000) observes that the giving of the gifts anticipates a progressive functionality – service and working:

The three terms—**gifts**, **service**, and **working**—relate closely to one another, but they are not synonymous. Each item is the source of the one that follows: service comes from gifts, and working from service. The term *gifts* appears frequently in this epistle with reference to the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The **gifts** of the Spirit empower each Christian to function in the body of Christ. **Service** derives from terminology that Paul used frequently to describe a variety of ministerial activities occurring within the church. p. 214

#### Four Bonds of Unity

Paul here points them to the fact that their problems were in seeing each others' differences as a problem, rather than a gift from God for making their service better. By showing the unity and that these all came from the same source, he's breaking down this idea of the differences being a problem. According to Wiersbe (1996), since there was

division in the Corinthian church, Paul begins with an emphasis on the oneness of the church. In doing so, he pointed out four bonds of spiritual unity:

### **We Confess the Same Lord**

This concept is expressed in 1 Cor 12:1-3. Paul contrasts their experience with the unconverted and their present experience as Christians. Paul shows first that even though they may have been on different pages in how to manage the Corinthian church, they really were all being led by the same Lord – therefore it was a directional challenge. He was able to show that they had a common goal or direction and therefore were really on the same team. It's the idea that says, if Jesus really is everyone's Lord, then unity will prevail. Even though we don't always feel like it, we need to understand that we are really going in the same direction.

### **We Depend on the Same God**

This concept is expressed in 1 Cor 12:4-6. Weirsbe says there is a trinitarian emphasis here – same spirit, same Lord, and same God. Paul is simply seeking to express in this passage that, similar to the above where we confess the same God, now we also depend on the same God. Dependence goes beyond expression. This isn't an idea of same words and different actions, but rather – same words, same action. He's pointing out that the individuals in contradiction in the Corinthian Church are really on the same side and seeking to use the same methods. He brings out the differences of giftedness, but says it in a way that expresses it in terms of unity, not uniformity.

### **We Minister to the Same Body**

This concept is expressed in 1 Cor 12:7-11. Paul states the gifts given are for the good of the church. He points out that even though your gift is for the good of the church, it doesn't mean mine is against it – and vice-versa. These gifts aren't here to promote self, but to be used in humility because they aren't about us, rather they are about the church. There are many ways to define the gifts: by style, by use, and by inreach vs. outreach. Yet, if we do that, we're missing the point of Paul, who sought to emphasize that the gifts are given to unite us in ministry to the one body – the church. No Christian should complain about his or her gifts, nor boast of them. We are simply “many members in one body, ministering to each other” (Wiersbe, 1996).

### **We Have Experienced the Same Baptism**

This concept is expressed in 1 Cor 12:12-13. Paul seeks to emphasize again that all the area of giftedness, is expressed in the realm of the Spirit. It is the Spirit's call on our lives and at His direction that we are called to serve the greater body of believers. Because of this single and simple baptism, it signals that we are all part of one body of Christ. There is no division by way of race, status, or gender.

These seem to be a bit idealistic, as if to say, “If we would only understand these issues, we would be unified.” Maybe in a perfect world that would be true. Yet, certainly understanding these common bonds could help the movement along the path of unity, because with these four concepts in mind, it becomes plainer that Paul wants to help us understand that the Holy Spirit gave us these gifts because He intended to get the church to operate under the banner of unity (Nichol, 1978, 2002).

White, in her book *Evangelism*, acknowledges the variety of the gifts within

God's Church in light of the differing background, culture and current status of the Seventh-day Adventist movement (White, 1946, 2002). She states,

In all the Lord's arrangements, there is nothing more beautiful than His plan of giving to men and women a diversity of gifts. The church is His garden, adorned with a variety of trees, plants, and flowers. He does not expect the hyssop to assume the proportions of the cedar, nor the olive to reach the height of the stately palm. Many have received but a limited religious and intellectual training, but God has a work for this class to do if they will labor in humility, trusting in Him. (p. 98-99)

### **Diversity**

Up to this point, the focus has been on the unity aspect. "Unity without diversity would produce uniformity, and uniformity tends to produce death. Life is a balance between unity and diversity" (Wiersbe, 1996). According to Wiersbe, the weakest spiritual groups are those that don't allow for diversity. However, there is a divine balance to understand because if diversity is not kept under control, it could destroy unity which will lead to anarchy.

In my opinion, this is an issue that is facing Adventism today. As we have grown and matured, the wider our belief structure has become. How much lack of uniformity we can handle will depend as much on our view of unity as anything else.

Mellancamp, (1985) puts it this way, "I know there's a balance. I see it when I swing by." Paul's desire is to bring about balance to the issue of diversity and unity. This balance between unity and diversity is to be found in the theme of natural dependence. In 1 Cor 12:14-20 this idea of dependence upon each other is highlighted. We can't all be the eye, the ear, nor the hand. Paul moves to extremes in this section of chapter 12 to emphasize a point. That point is we cannot all be the same, or there would be no functioning body. We would have too many gaps in function to function at all.

The key in the next section of 1 Cor 12:21-26 is the idea in verse 21 that says we cannot say, “I don’t need you!” (NIV). According to Weirssbe, the only way for unity to work is when the members of the body promote unity as they discover their dependence upon each other. That’s the idea as brought out in 1 Cor 12:21-26. Clearly verse 25 says that we should all have equal concern for the other parts of the body. This is also reflected in Paul’s other passages about spiritual gifts as seen in Eph 4:25 “therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” Also in Rom 12:4, 5; “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (NIV).

This idea of working for unity while discovering dependence is challenging to think about. When is the balance found? How much disunity is caused until dependence is discovered? What is the key that helps people understand the need? Although crisis can create division, crisis can also at times bring people, who have been divided, to work together in tandem.

This became clear to a couple of church members of mine many years ago. The Adventist Church had recently adopted a satellite methodology to do evangelism and special events. This would allow the entire church to see and experience the same event at the same time. As my church prepared for the downlink one Sabbath morning, something wasn’t working.

The sound engineers crawled under the sound booth and wires were cut, unhooked and reconnected in a hurry to get the downlink to work. This was happening less than 10 minutes before the service was to begin. They worked frantically. Three



minutes before the service was to begin, they both appeared, straightened their suits, flipped a couple of switches and it all just worked.

I looked at them and said, “That’s why you guys are back here in the sound booth. You’d never want me back here, as I wouldn’t have known what to do. You were able to find the problem, fix it, and get us up and running with minutes to spare.” You could see the the compliment was well appreciated. However, I added one more line to the discussion.

I said, “But that’s why we don’t put you up front, because even though you know how to fix things behind the scenes, you wouldn’t know what to do if something went wrong up front.”

“Does anything ever go wrong up front?” They quizzed.

“Almost every week,” I informed them.

When I said that, I could sense that they understood the need for people like me, as much as I understood the need for them. This was clearly a testimony of the importance of and the need for diversity as we seek to work towards a common goal. Yet, it came about because of a crisis that pushed us to work together in ways we had never had to before.

There was a crisis in Corinth at the time of Paul’s writing that forced the believers to take a different look at the idea of unity within diversity. All this imbalance provided a teachable moment for the Corinthians. The teachable idea is that no one has a better hold on the Spirit because of the gifts they have been called to use (Christie, 1897).

Paul closes chapter 12 with the idea that he began with, that is, it is God who does the work of giving out the gifts. However, he throws a new twist: he puts a priority order

on the gifts (Wiersbe, 1996). Even though he said they are all important and needed, he is now coming out and saying some do have a higher importance. This does not detract from the “all needed” idea. Even in the body, there are some parts more important than others. Even though the absence of some body parts may handicap us, they would not kill us.

Paul has just shown us the necessity of all the gifts, but with the diversity of some being more crucial than others. This hierarchy must exist, or we would never have some leading and others following.

### **Chapter 13**

At this point, we move into 1 Cor 13. This is the love chapter. This is the chapter that gets read at funerals, at weddings and all around to express the right kind of love. Yet, when one looks at 1 Cor 13 in light of it being sandwiched between chapters 12 and 14 that talk about the issue of spiritual gifts, it becomes obvious that the context here must be looked at to see what kind of issues are really being discussed in chap. 13.

Paul begins the chapter by proposing and contrasting some extreme concepts – that is, the language of men and angels, having the ability to understand everything, super-human amounts of faith, and the willingness to give all possession away. With these extremes, Paul sets the stage to understand that even if his life was using the gifts of 1 Cor 12 to this wonderful extreme, it would mean nothing if there was no love behind the use. Love becomes the glue that holds the whole “body” together.

Here he uses five spiritual gifts: tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith and giving. In emphasizing these five gifts, he points out that their exercise would be useless, nothing, of no value, without love (Walvoord, Zuck & Dallas Theological Seminary,

1983). Paul is likely speaking in extremes to make a point. Because some things, even done without love do still accomplish some good, at least in the short-run. However Paul seeks to make a point that aims for the best, not just the good. By casting it in extremes, he's showing the need to get it right, with love at the center.

Simply put, 1 Cor 13 reinforces the thoughts of chapter 12 by putting love in the mix. According to Pratt (2000), Paul pointed out that Christian love is the most important of all gifts from the Spirit of God. He called the Corinthians to pursue love, without which all of their spectacular gifts amounted to nothing. Paul is clearly stating that no matter how good your gift is portrayed, it's not doing anything worthwhile if there is no love involved. Walvoord et al., (1983) suggest that no matter how useful spiritual gifts are, if they are not helpful, they can be destructive, if they are not ministered in love.

Clearly, Paul has argued for unity and seeks to keep people away from a selfish attitude that simply says, "It's all about me."

While Paul proceeds to analyze love in verses 4-7, he sets forth seven things that love is and eight things that move against love. Those seven are: patience, kindness, rejoices with truth, protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. In contrast, the things which move against love are: envy, boasting, pride, rudeness, self-seeking, easily angered, keeping record of wrongs, and failing

In this passage, Paul shows the superior qualities of love while challenging the reader to take on the true aspects of love. Throughout the paragraph, we see glimpses of what the faults of the Corinthian church must have been (Nichol, 1978, 2002).

There is a sense in chapter 13 that the issue of love is a sense of maturity within the Christian world. It appears as if Paul might be chastising the people and saying, your

lack of unity in the midst of diversity not only shows that you need to work better together (chapter 12), but it also shows that you are not maturing as a believer.

The most common Greek word for love in the New Testament is the word *αγαπη*. Yet, it is one of the least frequent words in classical Greek. The New Testament doesn't derive its meaning so much from classical language, as much as from the LXX. From that manuscript, the word *agavph* or some form of it is used 95% of the time where the English translations use the word "love" (Wood, 1996). "The early church seems to have chosen this term and infused it with a new Christian connotation (God and Christ's self-giving love)" (Uteley, 2002).

Perhaps that infusing wasn't as much by design, as by accident. For as Richards (1987) says,

Well, the New Testament church *was* dynamic. The truth, the love, the transformation that marked the Christian fellowship was distinctive in a world that was void of each. But that same trio is meant to characterize the family of God in every age, and in each we must struggle to maintain their balance. The way to victory now as in New Testament times was marked by struggle, setbacks, slow growth, and time. Maturity then as now comes only gradually, and often seems choked out by problems. (p.857)

In other words, it could be that as the Christian's problems arose, they were dealt with, allowing people to mature and progress, and as such the ideas of *αγαπη* love manifested itself and became a part of everyday life. As people saw Christians really working to accept one another, the new meaning of the word became apparent.

Paul speaks here before this word had received its definition. So, Paul must begin to define it. To do so, he does not need the classics, the LXX or any other literature to help define what the word *agavph* means, because he goes on to define so clearly what love is and what it is not. In other words, if it is possible that people might not have a

clear picture of what he was talking about, he proceeds to tell them exactly what he means with this word. It becomes the NT word for God's character, and one that the readers are challenged to emulate (Utley, 2002).

These patterns of what *αγαπη* love pertains to the preceding chapter of unity in diversity. According to Weirsbé (1996), love is enriching (vv. 1-3), love is edifying (vv. 4-7), and love is enduring (vv. 8-13). When put in context with the preceding chap., the goal is unity in diversity and in order to make that happen, people need to enrich others, edify others, and stick-to-it. In other words, this is not something that is a program, or a sometimes reaction to life, it must be part and parcel of who the Christian is.

## **Chapter 14**

Chapter 14 begins with a reminder on the concept. Walvoord et al., (1983) says it is a chiastic structure built from chapter 12-14. The words, “Follow the way of love,” (NIV) is a present active imperative that shows the contextual link back to chapter 13 (Utley, 2002). Paul begins with unity in diversity, and then moves into desiring the greatest gifts. From there, Paul simply says that no matter how good or profitable those gifts are, there is a greater way to live with love. Chapter 14 now picks up on this theme as Paul urges his readers to make this way of love the definitive course of their lives. This method alone would then lead them back to a desire for the greater gifts.

Wiersebe (1996) suggests that “the mistake the Corinthians were making was to emphasize their own personal edification to the neglect of the church.” They, like most people even today, were more interested in themselves and building up themselves rather than they would the church. This attitude only hurts the basic DNA of the church and the

members as a whole walk away weaker than they would had the church lived by the way of love.

Also, 1 Corinthians 14 singles out two things as an example of coming back to the unity in diversity. These two things are prophecy and tongues. There has been much discussion over the years as to what kind of tongues Paul is talking about. The tongues issue is beyond the scope of this paper and won't be discussed further other than to say, it is one of the gifts Paul lists and if the body is to function at its peak potential, it must have a biblical use of tongues operating. Yet, even in the issue of tongues, Paul asserts that a single gift cannot operate as a silo. All of the spiritual gifts are needed to make the body function according to plan.

In the remainder of the chapter, Paul uses these tongues and prophecy to emphasize his point even more. He talks about prophecy being the greater gift. It is measured by its value to the church, rather than to the individual. Paul never denies the value of tongues to the speaker, but placed much greater emphasis and value on building up the church body (Wiersbe, 1996). However, isn't this the value we see presented throughout 1 Cor 12-14? Clearly the whole unity in diversity theme takes emphasis away from the individual and puts a greater emphasis on the group.

Verse 5 reads, "so that the church may be edified" (NIV). This was one of Paul's favorite words (Wiersbe, 1996). It's a clear theme for him: to edify, to build up, to support, and to strengthen. Paul is continuing the argument that has run through chapters 12 and 13 so far. It's the argument that the Christians were placed there to build up and work together, not to tear down.

Wiersebe (1996) says "the mistake the Corinthians were making was to

emphasize their own personal edification to the neglect of the church.” However, Paul joins the thoughts of diversity and unity together with love here in this example that it is really all about building others up, not ourselves. That’s how diversity works. That’s how love works. In another one of Paul’s letters, Phil 2:4, he stated it this way, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (NIV).

There is something even stronger here in this first section of chapter 14. The original word used in vs. 1 is: διωκετε. Its meaning is not just one to follow the way of love, but to pursue it, to obtain it. It is to take whatever pains it may cost to get it. A person shouldn’t stop until it is obtained. No matter the cost, to do whatever it takes, to not miss it, to get it at all expense (Henry, 1706/1994). This is supposed to be the “way of life” for them (Walvoord et al., 1983). According to Praat (2000), they must pursue, follow and desire it. Clearly, the unity of the believers working together in love is the strongest push for the believers in this section.

Some could argue that the Christian church is not very unified today with so many denominations and so many churches on various street corners around the same town. If the church is a body, isn’t it natural that the body grows, gives birth, and another body comes out? Surely the idea of unity in diversity could also be adapted to the idea of multiple denominations, or even multiple churches within the same town of the same denomination. However, do we really pursue this “way of life”? Perhaps we achieve it today more by accident than by actual chasing after the idea of spiritual unity.

In 1 Cor 14:6-25 we see the heartbeat of the collaborative theme in these three chapters – chapters 12, 13, and 14. Bringing all of this together we see unity out of diversity, working it together in love for each other, building the body of Christ. Now, in

this section, we see eight different times where Paul uses the word understanding.

Understanding is very different from listening, “it is not enough for the minister to impart information to people; the people must *receive* (italics supplied) it if it is to do them any good” (Wiersbe, 1996). Praat (2000) agrees and points out that Paul says without interpretation, tongues are pointless.

It’s as if Paul has built this argument climax to say, it’s about preaching the gospel. There must be more than information; the listener must also have understanding. Notice the track that Paul uses to get this section understood. It is spiritual gifts, built on love, which builds up others, which helps people understand the gospel message. If our gifts aren’t used to help people inside or outside of the church better understand and live the gospel, then they really are not working right.

Wiersbe (1996) continues by stating, “Paul used three simple illustrations to prove his point that there must be understanding.” These illustrations speak to clarity of thought. These thoughts must be heard and understood by the listener, or they won’t respond in an appropriate way of understanding.

This collaborative theme, working together with different gifts for the common good of all is a strong theme throughout scripture. For example, in Gen 2:18, God said it wasn’t good for man to be alone, he needed a helper, someone to work beside him. It is a pretty well-known proverb that says opposites attract. In a couple’s relationship, usually one is outgoing, the other more quiet. One is often the thinker and doer and the other a planner and developer. One is usually organized and another more spontaneous. It seems that God understood that Adam needed someone who would complement him and help him, so he created Eve. They were united in their diversity.



Then in Num 10, we see the story of Hobab. Moses asked him to help guide them through the wilderness because he knew the territory. He said, “you can be our eyes” in vs 31 (NIV). This was the same group of people who had the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire at night to guide them. They didn’t move their encampment until the pillar started to move. They only stopped when the pillar stopped. Yet, Moses seemed to understand the benefit of the collaborative effort as they worked together with God guiding them, but with Hobab also helping them.

Other examples include, but are not limited to, Ps 133 where the Psalmist proclaims how good it is when brothers live in unity. Then 1 Pet 3:8 talks about unity, brotherly love, and other characteristics which point to this fundamental theme of working together with the gifts we have, while maintaining love for each other so we can grow and edify the church.

### **Applied Theology in the Ministry Context**

When I played baseball, I understood instinctively the power of collaboration and working together. I knew that when I picked up the ball and began warming up my arm before a game that some would play in the outfield and others the infield. I knew that we would put the best batter at the 4<sup>th</sup> spot (clean up). I also knew what my position was. I was rarely the best batter, but I was fairly consistent in getting on base. I wasn’t upset by the fact that I couldn’t bat at the 4<sup>th</sup> spot. I wasn’t upset that I couldn’t pitch (I tried once and it was a total disaster). However, I also knew I was the best catcher on the team. I knew my place and everyone else knew theirs.

My time in baseball played out the concept of unity in diversity very well. There was a common goal that the team was about. That goal was to have a winning season and

then go on to win the play-offs. Yet, in order to have that one big goal, there needed to be smaller milestones along the way. We had to win the games we played in. Each of those milestones required that we set minor goals along the way. Examples of the smaller goals we set were: throw strikes, let's get these last two players out and then when we are up to bat, get a hit and get on base, and score runs.

We understood those minor goals as being where our diversity kicked into gear and we each did our job towards those common goals. It was necessary to come in periodically and talk to the coach to regroup, get back to what we were about, and get direction as we moved forward. That happened at least at every half inning, but it also happened each time the coach felt the need to call a time out.

The key to baseball, or any sport, is unity in diversity. We must work together for the common good, or the team will fall apart. There are countless stories about star players who begin to think only of their own glory and they drag a team downward, rather than lift them up to the wins. Unity is when the team works together. Diversity is players doing their specific jobs to help the bigger picture get accomplished.

This section in 1 Cor 12-14 has the same concept as this baseball analogy. According to 1 Cor 12:27-31 (NIV), each of us has a part to play in the church. We cannot all be the head. We cannot all preach. We cannot all administrate. We cannot all evangelize. We cannot all be out in front, just as surely as we cannot all be behind the scenes. Yet clearly that means that some can preach, some can administrate, some can lead out up front, and so on. It should go without saying that this also implies there is no one person who can do it all.

For too long, the church has relied upon the pastors to do the work of the ministry.

The church has come to the place that where one very large church seeks to hire a staff person (pastors, office staff, support staff, etc.) for every 65 people that attend church (Walter, 1993). However, Christians cannot continue down this road. It's unaffordable. Clearly, Paul is speaking to a volunteer-based church when he's speaking to the Corinthians. He does not undermine the need for senior leadership in the pastors, but there is a need for collaboration with everyone in the church.

One 19<sup>th</sup> century author, who continues to speak as an authority within the context of Seventh-day Adventism (White, 1863, 1977), has this to say about this whole process, "It is time for all to take hold of the work." For too long, we have relied upon the pastors to open the church, organize the work bees, schedule the evangelistic seminars, take care of the preaching, even writing the sermons. There is an unspoken attitude which reflects the idea, "Let the pastor do it, he gets paid for it."

One current well documented case where a church has truly been able to handle this idea of unity in diversity without having to hire people to do it is New Hope Church in Honolulu. It's about people working within their area of giftedness. The founding pastor, Wayne Cordeiro who in Honolulu, HI has been able to staff his church (pastors, office, support) with one staff member for every 250 people who attend (Walter, 2002) . They have a huge ministry of over 12,000 people who attend each week and volunteers run nearly everything from the set up of the local high school at 2:00 AM for services later that day, to the actual running of the weekly services.

Two other very good examples are Ed Young, of Fellowship Church (Whitman) and Dave Fergusen of Community Christian Church (Duduit, 2009). Each of these leaders have taken preaching to a new level by allowing others into the preaching

preparation. This is usually a closed system of the pastor/speaker's domain, but they have developed a system where people who have a gift can use it to further the sermon development.

It is a growing trend, where the preacher allows the sermon to be written with other people's input. It is an interesting feeling to allow others into that mix. Seven times I've preached an improvisational sermon, where the audience helps to shape the story and gives input to the outcome of the sermon, while retaining the biblical authenticity of the message. One website (Cleaveland, 2007), tells the story of how this is unfolding in one congregation. Another (Haffner, 2009), has started an open source worship project on Facebook®, where people can collaborate on the sermon before, during and after the message. I even jumped into the mix in 2008 when I created an online huddle and invited church members and people from around the country to join me in a short project as I developed the idea of getting a larger body of people with different gifts and different agendas to join the discussion as we worked on sermons (Walter, 2008). It was clearly a success in my estimation as we worked together and developed the thoughts that went into making the message stronger because of pooled effort.

One pastor's experience is this:

**Preaching:** *You mentioned your collaborative arrangement in terms of the teaching process. How does that work, and how did you get into it?*

**Ferguson:** I am the lead pastor at Community Christian Church (CCC), but I am not the point person on the teaching team; that's a guy named Tim Sutherland. We teach about the same amount, then we have a couple of other guys on the teaching team. It started out of a friendship I had with Tim. Tim is probably one of the brightest people I know. When we first started the church I would call him every week and we would talk over the sermon back and forth. I would tell him, "Here is the topic we are going with," and he would download – "Here are all my thoughts" -- and we would hash it back and forth. He was so taken with the vision of our church, what we were trying to do, he ended up moving his whole family to Chicago. He ended his practice; he was a marriage and family therapist at the time.

We would do it on the phone and then we would do it over lunch and over tennis. Eventually he came on staff; now it is a much more formalized process. (Duduit, 2009)

Ferguson makes use of video conferencing as part of his collaborative work to bring people together from around the country as they work on their sermons (Duduit, 2009). One website actually says that video conferencing is the next big thing to take over any collaborative work (Mackie, 2009). It's an interesting thought that the church wouldn't have to call so many meetings, yet be able to get meetings and maybe more done. However, video collaboration requires a bit of a learning curve. My experience with it is it is harder to pull a meeting off and takes a lot more preparation than we previously needed in live meetings.

My point in saying all of this is that there are many, many ways to collaborate along the way. Websites abound that allow a person to do this either privately or open to anyone. Examples include: : <http://www.huddle.net>, <http://www.facebook.com>, <https://docs.google.com>, <https://www.freeconference.com>, <http://www.oovoo.com>, and <http://groups.google.com> to name a few. These range from video conferencing, telephone conferencing, to document sharing. There is of course, the old-fashioned way of doing it, and that's simply getting together for a meeting and dividing up the duties afterward where each takes a part. Still another way is to use the teleconference technology.

Clearly the point of all of this was made apparent when Paul wrote 1 Cor 14:5, emphasizing that the church is edified, or built up when all do their part (NIV). The whole point of spiritual gifts in Paul's writings is all about working together, through our diversity, in love to build the body of Christ. When the body of Christ really functions like that, it is one of the best functioning teams ever developed.

I tell my church that I am not the best nurturer, because I am built like an evangelist and leader. Although I'm not a nurturer, I have two associate pastors who are. One is also a leader, the other is more of a counselor. Although we've only been together as a team for about 14 months, we are beginning to work together and understand our various strengths and weaknesses. If we were all the same, I tell them, there would be no need for two of us. However, my weaknesses are made perfect in their strengths and theirs in mine.

### **Conclusion**

When a congregation actually understands the idea of giftedness as outlined here in 1 Cor 12-14 and utilizes that knowledge to actually get the ministry they've been called to do, it would show the world an incredible picture of unity in diversity. The problem is, the business world has been leading the way on this collaborative approach, rather than the church. One website claims that when we invest in collaboration, we get more than double our return (Mackie, 2009). Another site (Etherington, 2009) calls it the "espresso thinking." That nothing increases the information flow better than when we sit around a relaxed table with something to drink and in that social time comes some of the most creative thinking.

As Christians we should be leading the way and we actually have one of the best resources to make an impact. Our message is so important, we cannot hold back. Yet the business world seems to have an advantage over us. When a person's salary is tied to whatever job they are assigned, they will simply do it, regardless of whether they like it or not. However, is that really an advantage? If the church, with its vast army of volunteers could learn to work within the unity in diversity model, then it could have a

much greater impact to be sure. We do it then, not because we are threatened with loss of income. We do it because it's the best way to do it. If the church could capitalize on this issue, perhaps we would have less burnout and more people involved.

I've certainly focused more on collaborative preaching where one who is good at stories, another who is good at studying, and finally another who is good at writing could make up a great collaborative team. Yet, it clearly goes beyond just sermon writing.

Paul, in 1 Cor 12-14 is proclaiming a simple message. It's the message that says we need to work together, even if we're different. Unity in diversity. He's saying that we don't stand alone. Those who love and support us help us use our gifts, even though we may be different from them. This difference, this diversity is from God. He designed us to accomplish His purpose. That purpose was to build the body of Christ from the inside through discipleship gifts or to build it from the outside through evangelistic gifts.

Finally, according to Paul, the use of gifts is the best way to get people to hear the gospel message. Therefore, it's with this in mind, that I seek to find a better way to prepare sermons so others can add to the clarity of thought, the relevance of the message and the impact on the lives of the people listening. This collaborative approach will build on the ideas presented in 1 Cor 12-14. The idea of unity in diversity, glued together with love, building the body of Christ. That should define all of Christendom, including the weekly message.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Collaborative Sermon Preparation**

Stott (2011) says that a definition of Biblical preaching is: “To expound Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God's voice is heard and his people obey him.” Yet, sermon preparation has traditionally been the sole authority of the pastor as s/he did it alone. Why is that? If the message brought out in preaching is so vital for people’s picture of God, why do we leave it to one person alone? Could it be better with more input? It seems that Chapter 2 shows us the need for collaboration. So, why do we not get involved in it?

One author describes the basics of the problem as church is about people; people praying together, worshipping together, studying together and fellowshiping together.

And yet, the “together” part seems to come to an abrupt end when it’s time to prepare the weekly sermon. Most pastors I’ve known prepare by locking themselves, alone, in a study with a few tomes of commentary. The most interaction they ever get is with their computer’s spellchecker. (Locke, 2007)

The pastor traditionally dealt with the text during the week because he had the training to do so and because no one else really had that kind of quality time to put into the text. The idea was that the pastor’s salary is partly to study the Bible, so he can preach in a relevant and compelling manner. However, the idea of actually using a team of people to prepare a sermon has become increasingly popular as well as quite common in larger multi-site churches. This chapter will seek to look at the current literature on the topic and seek to gather counsel from them on the topic.



When I embarked on this venture, I felt this was a relatively new phenomenon, but found out otherwise as McClure (1995) points out, the first time a collaborative approach to preaching and sermon preparation was talked about in modern literature was in 1963, when Brown Barr was the first writer to present the idea at the Lyman Beecher lectures. Since I was born just the year before this first instance, one could hardly call it a new concept. We will seek to outline the basics of the concept and what the literature is saying about the collaborative process.

This chapter, divided into four main parts, will seek to isolate the various aspects and reasons behind the movement of collaborative preaching preparation. The first segment is simply a description of what it is. The second section will focus on writers explaining why we should do this. Third, we will look at how various groups collaborate. Finally, we will look at the pros and cons of collaborative sermon preparation.

### **What is it?**

Preachers have traditionally been the ones trained to transform the Word on behalf of the congregation. It is a time-consuming and cumbersome task each week. Most preachers have felt that a “mutual process of discernment” was not required with others’ input (McClure, 1995). In other words, this is the domain of a single, called person. Yet, according to another author, the body, not just the pastor, must understand the most difficult scriptures (Yoder, 2003). If the greater body does not understand the message, then what is the point?

According to Yoder, this idea of the pastor being isolated in the sermon prep process came about slowly, through a transformation. She says:

The first factor leading to isolation of preachers was the change in the roles of leaders. Ministers were called out, and the preacher's voice was no longer just another voice. Now there was a voice more influential than others. When that voice was educated, it carried even more influence in the preaching role. The minister became the expert on all things Biblical and theological. As the minister began to receive financial remuneration, the expectation was that the minister was the most capable preacher and that this was part of the task for which the minister was hired. It became the duty of the minister to preach, even as others in the congregation were relieved of the assignment. What once had been the whole choir of voices was now a solo performance. (Yoder, 2003)

Yoder speaks from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective, there are many historical and polity related issues as to why this tribe of Christianity held on to not having an ordained clergy. Her point is clear though, the more professional the clergy, the more important the sermon has become. As the sermon has gotten more important, less and less people get involved.

Shifting the focus of preaching from the preacher to the congregation is the focus of one work (Tisdale, 1997). The author seeks to bring us to a proper exegesis of the text, but also to spend time exegeting the congregation. It is her idea that we tend to overlook the important role of the listener in the proclamation of the Word of God. Yet, as one author puts it, "Good listening makes for better preaching" (Quicke, 2003). Quicke is trying to articulate that for preaching to succeed, people must be listening and comprehending the message.

I must say I agree with this. I remember hearing a story while still in college about a preacher, who could not figure out what to preach one particular week, so he took off and went visiting for several hours until he knew what his people were dealing with, and then sermon preparation came much easier. The idea Tisdale seeks to bring out is that if we listen to the people, our sermons will be more relevant and will speak to the wider

audience with more strength. The long-held belief that being the “shepherd” of the congregation, will help you in your sermons seems to still ring true (Smith, 2010).

That is where collaborative sermon preparation comes in. It is simply a gathering of people to give a more rounded view of the congregation and the text. It is a way for the preacher to test out ideas ahead of time and see if they make sense, speak to the congregation, or really reach the point of the text.

Yoder (2003) says, “Collaboration is most simply defined as working together, to echo the meaning of the word *partnership*. ” Another source (Redhat, 2009) says it this way, “Innovation thrives in open environments where everyone is allowed to share knowledge and work together toward common goals. My idea might not work. But it could spark your idea that will.” Dictionary.com says it this way, “to work, one with another; cooperate, as on a literary work” (Collaborate, 2009). Therefore, a partnership where several minds focus on a single topic or idea can lead to a better work.

This has worked well in evangelistic sermons, passed down from speaker to speaker. Each speaker takes what has gone before and as they read it or preach it, they are sparked with a further thought to add to it and thus the sermon becomes their own and becomes a product of collaboration. True, it is only a one-way collaborative approach, and arguably, not the best form of collaboration. These evangelistic sermons are one way that collaboration has actually happened for many years. In addition, in a sense using multiple Bible authors to show a point in a topical sermon is also a form of collaboration. Others have taken the approach of using online subscription sermon archives. In their best sense, these are idea starters for the preacher who will take and adapt from these services.

Really, any collaborative approach will leave “loose ends, topics and subtopics that have not been fully examined...not been fully developed” (Gerkin, 1986). The idea behind the collaborative approach is to awaken new ideas and thoughts that will make the message clearer, more relevant, and more applicable to the hearers. Once those loose ends are discovered, someone can fix them. Unfortunately, many fall to the temptation of not collaborating and partnering with all of these ways, but rather allowing the online services, the former sermons, the group setting do the job for them (Yoder, 2003). This makes the minister negligent in his/her task. It also keeps the personality, charisma, bias or pet issue of the preacher from overshadowing the message (Satterlee, 2005).

For years in my own preaching, I pictured various members of my congregation as I prepared the sermon and asked what their needs were and to speak to them (Davis, 1958). But I was challenged on this by one article (Smith, 2010), that I am short-changing that process. Rather than imagining those people and still speaking to them in my own words, invite them physically into the conversation and hear how they would say it. In other words, take it to the next level. In other words, do not imagine, actually have the real dialogue with those people.

### **Why do it?**

According to one influential writer (Rainer, 2001), the sermon is one of the fundamental issues to growing the church. Since it is such a critical task, it seems strange that we limit the function of that to a single person. We have already discussed the theological issues of collaboration as outlined in one of the key passages on spiritual gifts in chapter two, the issue seems clear. Now the issue really revolves around whether we need to do collaborative sermon preparation, or not, in order to enhance the value of the

message as well as utilize the collaborative approach of spiritual giftedness as outlined in chapter two.

The question as to why a preacher would take on this extra task in a busy world generally divides into two basic types of literature. The first type is mostly older literature and it builds on the idea of spiritual gifts and biblical insight. Sermon collaboration is done because it is the right, biblical way to do things and from that the text will be easier to understand. More recent literature focuses on carrying the message to more people. Collaborative preparation is undertaken because of a calling to reach people with a life-changing message that will grow the kingdom. These ideas can actually work together and are not opposed to each other, because we must first understand why and then do it. Then more people really can be reached.

In the another book, the author, Carson (1987) emphasizes an imbalanced stress on select gifts. His key issue is that some groups have overly stressed certain charismatic gifts. I would continue his argument in this section by simply saying we understand the preaching gifts, but we limit it to a select few people. If we are truly going to follow the idea of spiritual gifts, then we need to understand it is at least highly probable others in the congregation would have gifts, albeit usually not as well trained, similar to the pastor's. Carson also brings out the idea that no gift is for the "personal aggrandizement" of any individual. All of these seem to suggest that since it is not about the pastor and that others have some gifts that could support this, we ought to do the collaboration thing. It only makes sense.

Besides having people who may have similar gifts to the preacher, we may also find that others have gifts that are simply supportive of the message creation. Gifts that

would surface to support the message could include, but are not limited to: knowledge, discernment, wisdom, helps, evangelism, teaching, shepherding and more!

In a DVD Lecture watched in Dr. Hyveth Williams' class in 2010, we saw media person Phil Cooke tell us that in the area of our giftedness, we should find out what we are good at and focus on it. We should stop working alone on our weaknesses, and get others to help us (Cooke, 2010) This idea fits in well with the collaborative sermon preparation idea because it understands that some preachers' gifts lie more in the proclamation side, while others lie in the study side and still others in the writing side. Rarely does one preacher have all three areas of giftedness.

McClure (1995) says that when we follow this collaborative approach to sermon preparation, it actually empowers the hearer because it grows out of a dialogic approach. In saying this, he simply states that when people give their input, they and their friends are more likely to listen to what is being said. He says, it brings "more reality into the pulpit" because people do not see the word as an "abstract or esoteric Word," but rather begin to understand that it speaks to the larger issues of what is happening in the congregation simply because they have been brought into the discussion of the sermon.

McClure continues this train of thought as he describes the Word of God as a "communal Word." This, of course seems to come from the idea that there is better counsel with many giving input. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed" (NIV).

Yet the typical preacher acts on the assumption that he/she is the commissioned professional and proclaimer (McClure, 1995). McClure continues with the dialog by saying that if we take the idea seriously, we will understand that the "Word cannot be

properly divined from” a single person. In fact, in another journal article, this same author says that one of the main reasons for preparing preaching in this collaborative manner is “to *support* each other by nurturing communication, ethical deliberation and hope” (McClure, 1996). Although this is not exactly discussing spiritual gifts, the allusion is clearly there. In this same journal article, McClure gives four reasons to use a collaborative approach to sermon preparation. Two of those reasons stand out in our discussion of collaborative preaching; 1) overcome the narrowness imposed by our social locations as preachers and 2) help uninitiated readers/hearers find their way into the biblical text.

In a dissertation on a similar approach to preaching, (Brown, 1999), it was noted that, “the collaborative process removes the fear and empowers the preacher to speak with the authority of the Holy Spirit, as communicated not just to him or but, [sic] to the whole community.” He is saying that agreement in the cooperative effort brings more conviction in the preacher. It also breaks down the model of the pastor being the prophet, teacher and chief proclaimer, helping people understand that they too have “an important part to play in the proclamation” (Brown, 1999).

Brown continues by saying that “The church has not been very successful in responding to” the exhortation of Paul in 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4 when he shows that when people use their gifts, the church is blessed. “It is not that collaborative preaching makes all people preachers, but rather that it brings together their experiences, small or great, so that they can make their contribution to the whole sermon and the preaching moment” (Brown, 1999). He is implying that the collaborative effort blesses the preacher, blesses the congregation, thus the church grows deeper.

Another author brings out that when we do not collaborate, we tend to be stuck in our own perspectives (Gerkin, 1986). Is not that the idea? Get more people together to study the text, to illustrate it, to focus on the key points and it should be a stronger message speaking to more people and to get unstuck.

Robinson (as cited in Berkley, 1986), gives quite a few reasons to collaborate on the sermon. He acknowledges that it would be easier to do in a large setting, yet certainly not impossible in a small church setting. He gives an example of one small church pastor in Oregon who gathers his church board together every Thursday for breakfast and goes through it with them. Robinson tells how the great preacher, John Stott, got feedback from an ad hoc group to help him learn the dimensions of the personal issues of the day and how they affected his congregation. Another example given was John Wesley, who “read some of his sermons to an uneducated servant girl with the instructions, ‘If I use a word or phrase you do not understand, you are to stop me.’”

Although one particular chapter in the book, *“Preaching to convince”* is really about listening to the preacher, it pays a lot of tribute to the idea of gathering a team of people to go over the preacher’s thought and to mull it over, unpack it, and give suggestions for a stronger finished product. This makes sense, because so much of our feedback is post-sermon, and by then, it is too late. Therefore, through these ideas, Robinson brings out the idea of paying attention beyond one person’s mindset, but moving into a stronger message delivery.

Out of this encounter, the pastor zeroes in on terms, ideas, and issues he must address and, as an added benefit, finds illustrations and applications for his sermon. Surprisingly, everyone agrees studying the passage beforehand heightens rather than diminishes interest in the sermon. They are made aware of the Biblical material, and they become curious about how the preacher will handle it. (cited in Berkley, 1986)



That is really the key, right? If we are really going to speak to our generation – to our society – then we have to engage the people and see what is going on in their heads, what their struggles are, how they see the text and then move the message forward. It seems to me that sometimes pastors get too involved in their own little world. Robinson (cited in Berkely, 1986) brings out that some are breaking out of that mold and actually digging deep into society and people's lives in order to make the Word more applicable.

It's all about connecting better with parishioners (McClure et al., 2004) and although the preacher likely won't come to any great surprises in this collaborative process, it's still worth hearing (McClure et al., 2004). That simply reminds me of times when I am sitting, working on something and someone comes and says, "have you thought of 'X'"? Although I thought of it, I had not thought of it in that particular instance. Nothing new, just applied here and now. Yet, another author said that it did help him hear the congregation and he was able to find out where they were theologically, socially and even politically (Price, 2007).

### **How Do We Do It?**

My introduction to the idea of sermon collaboration came when visiting a church in the Naperville, IL area. The senior pastor there, Dave Ferguson says this:

We stumbled into this a long time ago, and we love it. The point person on our teaching team is Tim Sutherland. When we started Community Christian Church, Tim was actually on staff at another church in Ohio. We had become good friends, so I called him every week to talk through the message I was working on.[sic] When he started his own counseling practice in Chicago, he eventually came on staff at CCC. When we went multi-site, it forced our hand to embrace a team approach to sermon preparation. Because some of our sites receive teaching via video and some have a "live" person teaching, we needed multiple teachers. When we wondered how we were going to do it, what Tim and I had done over the phone in a long-distance friendship became a model for what we did on a weekly basis. (Ferguson, 2008)

They were “forced” into it by doing church on multiple sites. Moreover, in doing so, they saw a need to keep the congregation going in the same direction although not being able to physically be in all places at one time. How they accomplish the actual task is like this:

We meet every Tuesday afternoon from 1:15–3:00 to discuss a message that will be given in 7–8 weeks. We call it the 105 fastest minutes of the week. We gather in a room—some face-to-face, some virtually—and Tim Sutherland sets the stage by focusing us on the task at hand. For the first 15 minutes, he reminds us of the big idea for the message—our bull's-eye for the upcoming sermon. We then identify the burning issues the message needs to address and the desired outcomes we'd like to see. We like for the group to think in terms of head, heart, and hands. How do we want people to think differently? How do we want people to feel differently? What do we want people to do differently? We want people to leave having been changed. We want them to live differently and not just recite what they just heard. We also ask, "Where is Jesus in the message?" We always want to make sure that the sermon is Christocentric.

After we've determined issues related to head, heart, and hands and have made sure the sermon is Christocentric, we enter into a time of creative brainstorming. Because we know the big ideas for many of the upcoming sermons, we put giant Post-it notes up on the wall and throw out all the different thoughts we've had, whether they be stories or other things we've run across throughout the week. This brainstorming session takes about 45 minutes.

We then spend the next half hour structuring the sermon. We determine how many movements the sermon will have. We weave in the best thoughts that we've written down on the giant Post-It notes.

After we finish structuring the sermon, we spend the last 15 minutes gaining consensus. We've all given our best thoughts, but we need to make sure we're all committed to the finished product. Once consensus is found, three or four people from CCC and the New Thing network are asked to write up the sermon.(Ferguson, 2008)

Clearly, one person could write the sermon in such a way that was well-crafted with gifted illustrations. In fact, I get these kinds of messages in the mail every year from various entities within my denominational structure for special weekends on religious

liberty for example. However, Ferguson's goal is consensus, not perfectly crafted. The question they ask: is everyone sold on this? (Duduit, 2009). There is a sense of authenticity in this. It is the idea that I cannot preach this unless I had a hand in making it and it makes sense to me. I like that, because as they share the message in their various locations, there will be obvious nuance as each speaker emphasizes things differently and brings out his/her own personality, but it carries the church in the same basic direction.

According to this interview, they go through each sermon about 4-5 times before it is given to the individual preachers so they can turn it into their preaching notes. (Duduit, 2009) Ferguson also thinks that this may be a bit of a generational thing to collaborate weekly on the sermon process, but Robinson and McClure take this idea clear back to the 1960s. In other words, it cannot just be a generational issue to go back that far. Yet, even though it was thought about in the 1960's, it does not mean it was in widespread use.

Still, the collaborative approach is not used much. Sermons are still the fountain of one man or woman's study time, in most churches. Perhaps it comes down to a busy pastor's schedule. Maybe it is a product of the old proverb, "If you want something done right, you will have to do it yourself." It seems, however, if we want the best for our congregations, we have an obligation to go beyond the easiest.

One minister for youth and young adults has a blog where he puts together what he calls an "open-source" sermon (Cleaveland, 2008). In the space of a blog, he drafts, edits and revises the sermon and it is fairly open for anyone to join in the discussion.

I did something similar from February through June of 2008, I used an online service at <http://www.huddle.net> and gathered a team of people who only met online and

shared in the process. It was a bit hit-and-miss experiment. Some sermons garnered much support, others very little, thus I was impressed to try again with real live meeting space combined with the online presence. However, my early experience in this several years ago showed me much value in this process (R. Walter, 2008).

Others have also tried the blog approach to this process (Locke, 2008; G. Walter, 2008; Walter, 2009; Wood, 2010). Doing a simple search on “Sermon Collaboration” on Wordpress.com’s website brings up nearly 1,000 hits (Search, 2011). One of them simply sent an email out as a reminder to check the blog (G. Walter, 2008). Another preacher (Haffner, 2009) started a Facebook page that allows for feedback before and after the sermon. Yet, another who hadn’t used Facebook to do this, said this very telling statement:

I have not tried this, but am intrigued. While not a huge fan of facebook [sic], it may be an easy way to access “feed-forward” input in the preparation of a sermon. The point of “feed-forward” input is to be able to hone a message in advance of it being preached by gaining input from an individual or group during the preparation process. (Wood, 2010)

His openness to the method, although untried by him, shows his ability to see through the normal and quickly discern the benefits of the collaborative approach.

It does take time, but spending time with church members and non-members alike, learning to understand the culture, are very important issues for an effective preacher (Smith, 2010). Smith handles the idea of collaboration and how much time it takes in a different way. He simply imagines sitting down at the table with someone to whom he is trying to speak. In that imaginative process, he gains a measure of collaboration. He considers teens, divorced people, single parents, and chronically ill people as examples.

Although this method has some advantages on the time issue, the benefits are clearly outweighed by the disadvantages. Smith describes them here:

This process forced me to look outside myself to the plethora of needs within and outside of my congregation. In spite of these benefits, I felt there was still something lacking. The needs I was addressing were the needs of the people as I saw them. The exposition of the text was my interpretation but without any of their insights. The application was based on what I thought they were thinking or needed. The language was primarily in my words, not theirs.

In essence, I had excluded their voice. There was no dialogue and my congregants were not personally represented. This experience led me to try something different.

I decided instead of imagining these different groups of people that I would actually bring them to the table and get their perspective. I set a date (usually earlier in the week, around Tuesday) when I met with them corporately. I wanted this process to be dialogical. I sent out an e-mail with the sermon text. I asked them to come to the meeting prepared (and they did) to discuss the following questions:

What do you think this text means? How would you interpret it?  
How would you apply this text to your life and people in your situation?  
Do you have any stories or quotations that might illustrate this text? (Smith, 2010)

Certainly a side benefit of this method would be that it would force pastors to preach messages founded in scripture and not just topical ones. As others approached the messages with the preacher, eventually someone would challenge a thought and the preacher would see the need to support the message with solid biblical facts. Another side benefit would be the early preparation that goes into the message, not last minute and late-night preps.

Smith takes a different approach to this process than Ferguson did though. Ferguson had a designated group of preachers involved in the process and it was the same group from week-to-week. Smith, on the other hand, fills his team with lay people, of homemakers, computer programmers, the unemployed, college students, and more. In

addition, along with the idea of filling the team with lay people, the group changes out periodically, to get new voices into the mix of the sermon.

This is actually the same way that McClure would recommend it. Bring a group in for a few weeks, change them out for a different group for a few weeks, and keep doing that. It seemed as if McClure's goal was to get most, if not all, of the congregation involved in some of the sermons over the year (McClure, 1995). This method has one key positive and one negative, as I see it. First, since you are using volunteers it allows group members to commit to this extra time for a limited period. This allows them to not burn out so easily. Secondly, on the negative side, it sounds like an organizational nightmare trying to organize those people and keep them on track. McClure does not address that issue at all. I am sure it could be a regular task of a secretary to fill the sermon preparation team, but still it could get cumbersome with regular training and recruiting. It would seem better to me that you find a balanced team, train them once, and find a way to say thank you to them in a meaningful and tangible way so as to keep them from burning out. This may actually be a stronger model. Not only would the team not have to be continually trained, but they would also get better at the process as they continued in the method. I well remember finding out it was easier to preach when I did it regularly within the confines of a system, than it was to preach irregularly as an associate.

In describing one scene where the author walks in to watch this process in action (Lowery, 2008), he wonders if this is a good idea. "I cannot help but wonder if this is too tall of a task for a group. I rarely agree with *myself* when I'm putting together a sermon—let alone 15 others!" He is overwhelmed by the very idea and is skeptical.

However in the team that Lowery watches and interacts with, he finds each

sermon given to one of the five main teaching pastors on staff to “drive” that particular message. That person will have already studied the passage, outlined the basics of the passage, highlighted key words, and studied the context. From there, the conversation begins and what surprises Lowery is the depth of the discussion. They are not hitting the surface of this work; they are diving in and getting to the meat of the text. The conversation has questions, interruptions, rabbit trails, and yet stays on topic and goes into the passage to a great extent deeper than what could be imagined by a single individual. They emerge with a clear map of the sermon outline, the key points it will highlight, illustration ideas, and then it is ready to manuscript.

Lowery notices one key at the end of his article. He says:

Three weeks ago this morning, I was working on a message that dealt with an incredibly difficult subject. I was pulling out my hair, losing sleep, tearing up pages of notes, and driving my poor wife crazy. Here's the only thing that helped: I reached out. I called my father to bat around ideas. I shared my notes with two trusted friends I meet with each week for prayer and reflection. I cracked open books and commentaries to see who agreed with my conclusions and who didn't. I shared tidbits with one of my co-workers to make sure I wasn't crazy. As I think about my sermon preparation honestly and soberly, I realize I do exactly what the folks at New Life do every Monday morning—I just don't have everyone in the same room at the same time.

This fascinating awakening on his part shows us that the collaborative effect is not all that new after all. Nevertheless, the idea of an actual team should actually enhance the sermon preparation.

Pastor Ed Young, of Fellowship Church in the Dallas, TX area, has done much in the area of collaborative sermon preparation. This is something he is involved in on a weekly basis and he is noted for being highly creative; including driving a real tank onto the stage and climbing out of it to stand on top of it and preach.

Young takes the idea of collaboration to the point of creating a site that will allow

you to join his collaborative team, and for a price, you can buy some of their collaborative work for as little as \$10, or buy all the weekly resources for \$99/week which includes skits, music and other worship pieces (Young, 2008). This is similar to the age-old idea of buying sermons online, in a magazine, and so forth. The hope is you will use this as a tool to help you do your own thinking. The problem, in my opinion, is that this easily slides into consumerism to the busy pastor who ran out of time this week and will preach it verbatim without putting his or her own work into the actual message.

Young has said, "Vegas has nothing to say but they know how to say it, yet the church has everything to say but so often we don't know how to say it" (Duduit, 2005). His idea is that with more work and more creativity, the message of the gospel will be heard by more people. He also says, that 80% of what a senior pastor does is preparation and delivery of the message. Young describes in this interview that a quality preacher will not put sermons together – or the creative idea for it – a night or two in advance. In most situations, it just will not work. You simply need more time to generate a quality message.

So, Young and his team tend to plan his messages loosely, a year out. However, as always is the case, it changes. Young says it changes about every six months. Nevertheless, for Ed Young, in order to find the creative genius, he had to realize how creative the people around him were and that is when he invited them in to help him craft the message. They call it simply, "Team Creativity" (Duduit, 2005).

Young says it changed the course of his communication for the "zillion times better." His process is fairly straightforward and goes like this: First, he is the one in the driver's seat. He needs to know the direction and the content of the message before



anyone else comes into those creative meetings. Therefore, he has done his research, done a lot of thinking on the message, and shares that direction with the team. He puts it all up on a dry erase board. It is at this point that the team jumps in with ideas, creative thoughts, asking questions, and others.

Young writes those thoughts down, listening to their input and then moves to a Dictaphone where he will go through the message verbally with his and their thoughts. His assistant then puts it in the computer and gives them all a hard copy. Later in the week, they sit down around a table and all go through it again.

Then after he preaches it at the first service, the team comes together and analyzes the message again to help him see what he missed. However, in this section, Young is not simply perfecting the message, he is also training people to speak who are on his creative team.

His team is made of people from different walks of life, different seasons of life, made up of both men and women. Moreover, his team is constantly changing. When he is doing a series on parenting he made sure he had parents, grandparents and even single people there to help in the creative process.

Some choose to do the collaborative process different from others. Each feels his or her system is working well. None wants to quit doing it. Are there any downsides?

### **What are the Pros and Cons?**

Along the same lines as Young (2008), along with McLaren (cited in Duduit, 2001) say: “I think it is going to be hard for a lot of us as preachers because we have postured ourselves in a modern posture, as the experts who dispense certainty and knowledge, rather than a more ancient view of the spiritual leader as people who guide

others into mystery.” Therefore, the sermon is not meant to be about truth or dogmatism, but rather about challenging people’s thinking into a subject that spurs even more thoughts and questions. Therefore, the idea of collaborative sermon preparation is not simply about producing a better sermon, but it is also teaching people how to study scripture, it is discipleship at the very core.

McLaren goes on in this interview to state, “showing and listening become as important as telling and convincing.” McLaren is fighting against the modern methodology of telling people the “truth” as they move through scripture. To him, it is almost like a show and tell event. Let me show you what I learned, now ask me questions, and let me listen to your experience next (cited in Duduit, 2001) . It is actually quite an amazing idea when you stop and think that at least some of the sermon preparation is about listening, some about showing, and there is still room for telling and convincing. Yet, McLaren is not so much talking about preaching preparation. The remainder of the article touches on the idea of relativism, “Here’s what I think, why don’t you go home and think about it and see where God leads you” (cited in Duduit, 2001). His collaborative ideas do not come to a conclusion towards a preaching event, but he seems to imply that it’s sufficient that he has created good questions in your mind for you to ponder. Although it is good to get people to think deeper about what the Bible says, could this idea drift away from Christian orthodoxy because it never seems to land on solid ground?

Quicke (2003) talks specifically about collaborative preaching and believes it may never happen, but would be a great thing if the whole congregation would undertake to study the text the preacher will use the next week. He says, “nothing is more effective in

raising the possibilities of fruit bearing. Preachers have a responsibility to raise the stakes.” What Quicke seems to argue is that the preacher needs to raise the bar of involvement for people in the sermon process. If the people got involved in the text before the preacher spoke, they would listen with a heightened intentionality and would have a basis to support or challenge what he said.

The conclusion of the matter is that doing sermon preparation in a collaborative team is more time consuming, more work, makes the preacher work in a more disciplined manner and forces him out of his study to be with others. Although at first glance, they may sound like negatives, these issues seem to propel the message to new heights, full of great information, life application and that engages more people.

The only con really seems to be that it takes more time. Nevertheless, if it makes the message stronger, helps people listen and grows the kingdom, it seems like spending more time is a cost worth expending.

In an article on teams taking notes together, the author (Kelly, 2010), points out four key issues to collaborate on in note taking. They are 1) define the benefits, 2) choose the appropriate applications, 3) set the guidelines, and 4) set the roles.

Loosely translating that idea to the collaborative preaching model, you must define 1) why do it and the good it will bring, 2) choose who to work with, 3) set guidelines on how to make it happen, and 4) establish the roles of the people involved and what they can do for you. These will be crucial questions to answer for building clarity to the process.

Perhaps one of the biggest issues that would argue for us to get involved in collaborative preaching teams is the basic question asked in one article, “Are we

practising [sic] what we preach?” (Mulholland, 2009). Although this article focuses on collaboration in general, we must ask ourselves as ministers whether we really believe in the doctrine of spiritual gifts. If we do, we really have no choice except to involve people in the use of their gifts. We must do this, even if it means we stop being the doer for the congregation and we begin to help people get involved in all aspects of ministry. Rather, the preacher must see his role in line with Eph 4 where the members are equipped for doing the ministry. The preacher is still doing ministry, just more as a leader and not so much as the only worker-bee.

Without even thinking about the collaborative effort, most preachers are already doing so. They are collaborating with the Holy Spirit, the Bible writers, and are seeking to be a collaborative partner with God (Conrad, 2005). Why not allow other God-followers into the study to build the message in a stronger fashion? It really only makes sense and allows us to really teach at the deepest level what we propose to teach elsewhere in ministry.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Beginning the Collaborative Approach**

Collaborative sermon preparation is not the usual way of doing “business” as a church pastor. For most, the sermon preparation is solely the pastor’s territory. Obviously, we have taken a look at how some got involved in the process of a collaborative sermon preparation team. Where did this idea come from for me, how did it come together and where did it take us is the story behind this chapter. This is the story of the collaborative sermon preparation project, how it formulated and where it landed.

The idea of building a collaborative sermon preparation team came to me while I was living and pastoring in Northern Colorado. I attended a church planting conference in the Chicago area at the Community Christian Church, where Dave Ferguson is the lead pastor. He is mentioned and quoted in the previous chapter. As I listened to him talk about doing a team preparation process, it seemed like a great fit for us because I pastored a unique Adventist church, in style and structure. It was the first Adventist church to meet on multiple sites, or multi-campus. In order to make the multi-campus strategy work, we took the approach that all three pastors would be at both services. One focused on preaching and vision (me), one focused on music and worship, and one focused on connecting to people and various outreach activities. This meant we went to church on Saturday mornings in Greeley, Colorado and Saturday afternoons in Ft. Collins,

Colorado. The multi-site church phenomena is primarily done by churches with many available preaching pastors, or via video feed of some sort and it is primarily the idea of very large mega-churches.

We were not a mega-church. We averaged 185 when we launched the second campus and quickly grew that first year to over 240 in attendance. We made that move, because we saw people willing to drive 45 minutes or more to church, but only those that lived within a 15-minute drive were willing to bring their friends. Thus, we took church to them.

Our specific issue was we had two pastors both capable of preaching quality messages, and we made the assumption that the sermon was the primary vehicle for taking the church in the direction of the vision. We determined that the sermon was where the pastor/preacher had the whole congregation in front of him, where the vision casting took place, and where the church stayed together.

In a multi-campus model of ministry, despite sharing finances, board leadership, structural issues, and others, the primary thing that would keep them from drifting into different churches was the preaching moments. Thus, it was decided that if my associate pastor and I, plus a gathered team, could prepare the sermons together, each of us could preach on either site and both congregations would still receive the same essential sermon. This would allow us to attend only one campus per week, but with the satisfaction of knowing that both services were going in the same direction.

Unfortunately, we both moved before we were able to see this come to fruition. Yet, although I no longer have a multi-campus church that essentially required a shared preaching load; I caught the idea of the team model, the giftedness, and of utilizing a

greater force of good for the sermon preparation as was outlined in chapter two.

The goal of the sermon preparation team was to utilize more people in the process who may also have valuable gifts that could be useful in strengthening the message. This would not only gain a great quality of help for the preacher, who would be able to utilize people with writing skills, study skills, and critical thinking skills, but it would also help those on the team find a great amount of fulfillment in the process where they were able to 1) utilize their spiritual gifts in one of the most important functions of the church, and 2) it would help shape and carry the vision of the church in the preaching of God's word and 3) show that the sermons would be stronger than normal because the synergy created by the process would enhance the spirit-led elements of the sermon.

#### What Could the Team do for me?

Early on, my first advisor<sup>1</sup> challenged me to prepare a list of what my team members could do for me and what they could not do for me. It was his desire that I make sure I wrote down what the team will be able to do, so that there was clear role clarity. He also did not want me to short-change my normal sermon process.

The development of that list helped me to shape this project as much as anything. These two questions were constantly in my mind as I prepared my training, what we were asking the team to do and how I would later analyze the project.

First of all, I asked, "what could my team do for me?" Theologically I knew that they could help me study the passage. The team members would come with different commentaries, different books they have read and would be able to bring a more rounded

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Loren Siebold

informational study to the message. Their ability to organize and think through a passage would give insight into organizing and outlining the messages, which could help bring clarity and definition to the message. I knew that I naturally go to a certain level in my study of a given passage and I have the ability to get into ruts. They would not have the same ruts I have, so their insight would allow me to see my blind spots and thus dig deeper than I might do otherwise.

On an interpersonal level, the team could help me choose topics, find a sermon thesis as well as a theme for the series. The sermon preparation team could also add to the pool of meaning to the text. What I mean by this is their experience with the stories, the theology, and the application will be different from mine. Therefore, they will bring new ideas and concepts to the message production. Yet, they would also bring new people information – the needs of the congregation, needs of non-churched people they know – which would allow us to think through the message and its impact on peoples’ experience. This interpersonal experience would allow us to truly speak better to the needs of the congregation.

Culturally, helping me understand whom I am speaking to would be huge. Having only been in this congregation for two years, they could help me understand the culture of both the congregation and the greater community where we live. With this cultural concept in mind, we could develop a plan together for preaching to the needs of the church and community long-term. Developing measurements would in turn show us whether our messages were stronger or not.

Finally, the sermon preparation team could help me craft the sermon aesthetically. We live in a visual society and therefore the best messages are not simply heard, but also



seen. So they could help me with quality illustrations and stories, they could help find video and graphic illustrations. My hope was that this team could take my outline and build the graphical portion with little input from me.

### What Could the Team not do for me?

Next, I asked the question, “What can my team not do for me?” and I asked this about the same basic areas of the message series.

From a theological standpoint, I could not let the team study or exegete the passage for me. I needed to still dig in and do my exegetical work. I needed to make sure I was listening to God’s word and not just allowing someone else to make up the information for me. If I was going to preach it, I needed to be able to stand up with integrity and say, “I believe this to the core of who I am.” Ultimately, from a theological point of view, I could not let the team members decide the key point of the message. I needed to have veto power over the key of the message. That is not to say I wouldn’t listen to them, but I could not abdicate the responsibility of the message to the team.

Further, from an interpersonal standpoint, I realized that I could not allow my team members to preach the message for me. This may be obvious, but cannot be overstated. The bottom line is that the buck stops with the senior leader. In addition, I could not give away my ability to connect with the congregation. Just because they will give me insight into my congregation, does not mean I can let go of my responsibility to connect one-on-one or especially while I’m preaching. I could not let the preaching team prepare preaching notes for me. In other words, they can help me write the manuscript, but when it came to preaching the sermon I need to put it into notes that would allow me to 1) make it memorable, 2) put it in a fashion to preach without notes, and 3) speak in

my own language, or in my own armor. These messages had to be mine, given from God, and needed to come across as genuine.

Next, on the interpersonal level, I needed to retain the power of veto. This is related to the last point above, but it clearly says to the sermon preparation team, I'm still the captain of this ship and I need to make final decisions on content, graphics, and key issues. In order to use a team, not everyone can be the quarterback. As the leader, I needed to make sure I retained that position of decision-making.

Closely related to this power of veto is the idea that I needed to own the material. I cannot use an unnatural illustration no matter how good it is. I have to speak into a culture that I understand and one that is natural for me. I must own the material, not use it because someone on the team thinks it is a better illustration. I hope that both of these would come together, but if they do not, then I must use what is natural for me.

Furthermore, what the sermon preparation team could not do for me in the area of aesthetics is that I must have final say in the PowerPoint files, the video clips, and the illustrations. This is because, again, I must be able to preach in my own style and the illustrations must look like what I would use. Nevertheless, all of these are also memory tools that help to preach without notes. If I sacrifice and move to something unclear to me, but everyone else on the team thinks it is great, then I need to go with my instinct. It is about listening to the team, utilizing their resources, but then making the final call.

The final thing that the team cannot do for me is force me to stick dogmatically to my manuscript. Obviously as one preaches without notes, there is more free-flow of information presented than if I were to preach with a full manuscript. The team needed to see that the manuscript was an idea generator, a thought process, and that the key point of

the sermon was just as clear in the actual preaching event as it was in the reading of the manuscript. Whereas, if it gets said a little differently, they would need to understand that it is part of the process.

The above list helped to shape the overall project as we thought through the team process and we began working on it in a way that moved forward towards picking team members, making the task and beginning the process. The goal of choosing team members was three-fold: 1) to find a well-rounded group of individuals that were representative of the congregation, or had a good feel for the congregation, 2) to find people that could help with the various aspects of message preparation like illustrating, studying and talking through the passages used and 3) to find people who would be good team members, would show up, be supportive of the process, and would help drive the system forward.

### **Constructing the Team**

From my reading, I felt the best approach was to do like Dave Ferguson, make a single team and stick with it for the entire process. Yet, like Ed Young, I needed to be the driving force behind each message and not hand the reigns over for the key issues. These two key thoughts from my reading brought me to the point of pulling a team together to begin the work of the message preparation.

After much deliberation, the team member decisions were made. The team was made up of a retired Bible teacher, a nurse who is also a regular public speaker, a businessman who is also theologically trained, a defense attorney whose main gifts are in evangelism and outreach, a self-published author, a homeschool mom with a passion for

what preaching can accomplish, my two associate pastors, and an amanuensis who's only task was to take copious notes at each group meeting and was not part of the discussion process.

The team consisted of five men and four women, plus me. Each was chosen for their unique ability to add value to the process. Four of the team members, not counting the pastors, are local church elders. The three pastors, of course, work together in a regular office and ministry environment. All are active in the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church, in Sabbath School and worship. All interact with me on various levels of church life.

## **Training the Team**

### **Exegitcal Training**

Once assembled, the team needed training. I spent the entire first meeting and half of the second with them training them in the various aspects of the process. It was crucial that we begin on a solid foundation as to what we are seeking to do, why we were doing it and how we would get it done. Without this foundation, we could easily get off track and not even realize it.

I began with training in Bible study. It was important that we all realized again that a sermon comes out of its ability to properly understand and utilize scripture, as Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim 2:15 to rightly divide the word. Part of that discussion included exegeting the text, exegeting the congregational story (Tisdale, 1997) as well as a proper use of commentaries.

Most of them understood what it meant to exegete the text. Since six of us had

some form of theological training, this part went smooth. I did not want to skip over it though, because if at some point there is a conflict, I could come back to our standard and our purpose.

Exegeting the congregation was a bit different to describe. Some on the team had never thought of it before, even those who were regular public speakers. They had done it, without understanding they had done so, but when I described it, the lights came on for them. To realize just what the needs of this congregation were, to speak out of the text to those needs, and to apply scripture in a way that made sense to our hearers became a cause all championed in the process.

### Online Tools Training

I then trained the team in the use of online tools. Although we used places like [www.biblegateway.net](http://www.biblegateway.net), [www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com), [www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com), and other Bible and commentary sites, the primary place of training needed was [www.huddle.net](http://www.huddle.net). Huddle is a site designed specifically for collaborative teams working on projects together. Huddle has a calendar of upcoming meetings, discussion boards, a document upload section, task lists, meeting agendas as well as a few other minor things. Additionally, the team each needed not only to receive access to this site, but also shown how it works so that they would know it as a primary place for discussion, feedback and sharing after our meetings. Huddle turned out to be a very useful tool where a lot of the feedback and information gathered to help shape the sermon.

The idea behind using Huddle, was to allow team members to continue the discussion after our weekly meetings, to send reminders, to see how the sermon topic,

outline, then manuscript was shaping up at each stage of the sermon. It was to allow each member of the team to put in as much time to the process as possible, on his or her own schedule.

The whole process took seven weeks. The goal was to build four sermons. We took two weeks for training, three weeks on each sermon and one follow-up meeting. Each meeting's agenda was essentially the same. Our meetings on Tuesday evenings, began at 7:00 pm with a short time of prayer, and then jumped right in to a brief, verbal evaluation of the sermon preached three days before. The evaluation was not a formal evaluation, because the purpose of this part of the process was to prepare the sermons. So we focused less on "how Roger did in preaching," and more on what we did right, what we did wrong. The focus remained on constructing the sermon. This process lasted about 10-15 minutes.

For the next 40-50 minutes, we poured over the manuscript for the upcoming week's sermon, which were two to three weeks in the making. This is a manuscript, which they had helped to write. The members had access to this sermon manuscript on Huddle for at least the last 24 hours. At the meeting, each person went through what they saw as high and low points of the message and details needing to be changed. This created quite a bit of discussion at times, about where I may have written a vague idea, or an idea that was too strong for the point I was making.

For Example: One night I had presented a point where Jesus is in a party coordinated by Matthew with his tax payer friends. When the religious leaders walked in, the party essentially stopped and the people watched to see what would happen. As the leaders and Jesus discussed and Jesus concluded with the text, "I came to seek and save

that which was lost.” Then Jesus looked back at the crowd and said, “Party on!” Most of the members of my team felt like that was an inappropriate phrase, even flippant, for Jesus to use. I argued that I have used it before in my previous church and no one thought anything of it – even though that crowd’s average age was 30. In the end, I listened to my team, as they helped me exegete my congregation and helped me see that there were better ways to express this to my current audience.

The next stage of the weekly meeting was when we went through my next sermon outline. This was a very filled-in outline for the following week’s message. We spent about 20-30 minutes discussing the outline, the theme of the message, and the direction of the message. This piece was one of the crucial parts because it allowed me to have a fuller idea of the message and when it came time to write, I had more information to go by. Part of this related to our online Huddle discussions.

The final 10-15 minutes of the meeting, we spent discussing the basic scripture for the message two weeks in the future. I would have them read the scripture to themselves, or out loud, and we would discuss it off-the-cuff to see if anything as to direction would come to us. This often took on the idea of application, as well as looking for an overall theme. It was a brainstorming part of the discussion.

After the meeting was completed, I took the secretary’s notes from that evening’s discussion and uploaded them to the Huddle. This provided documentation of the meetings. Most of the time, it was simply about recording for future use, as I took my own notes during the meetings when it came time to write the message.

This was how our meetings went, but much influence came in the discussion because of the online Huddle. The online discussions on Huddle were as much a part of

the process as the face-to-face discussions on Tuesday evenings. Two team members only joined the discussion via huddle. Nevertheless, each week the live discussion varied and shifted according to the discussion online. Huddle allows you to follow the discussion in a much easier fashion than if we simply did a “reply to all” email discussion.

The Huddle allowed us to talk on our own time, at our own pace, and it allowed time for people to dig deeper. Each Monday, the day before our team meeting, I would post the current manuscript, the outline for the next week’s message and the scripture for the following sermon. When I posted the scripture, I also posted some initial commentary readings from the passage. This allowed the team members to get some understanding of the passage. Usually, people would read the commentary, dig more on their own and post those all before I outlined the message. Once the outline began to take shape, most of the study slowed down and we worked on the clarity of the message more.

My original hope was that people would dig into the various aspects of each message. One person would focus on the graphics, one on the illustrations, and another on the manuscript. Interestingly, though, they helped me focus on the study and writing aspect, and not so much on the graphics or spoken illustrations.

We called the sermon series, “Snapshots of Faith.” It took a more biographical approach with a snapshot look at four individuals in this order: Elijah, Sarah, Demas, and Matthew and each message tried to take a practical look at universal truths from each of the biblical experiences and how they could speak to us today in a life application.

After each meeting, I went home and began working my sermon back into a full outline, and eventually reducing it to a three by five card that went with me to the platform. This card served as a backup for me, but I rarely consulted it in the actual



preaching moment. The goal from the manuscript to Sabbath mornings was to learn the material and reduce it down to the basics so I could preach it without notes while retaining the depth of our weekly meetings.<sup>2</sup>

Week one focused on Elijah and the scripture passage of focus was 1 Kgs 18:32-35. This is the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel. I also stretched back into the story to discuss where Elijah came from, when he stepped into the story with Ahab and the declaration of no rain, and finally with the gathering on Mt. Carmel. The thesis of the sermon was that your past is not as important as God's call on your life. Elijah was not anyone great. He did not come from royal bloodlines; he did not have any credentials to get people to listen to him. The tagline for the sermon was, "Greatness isn't determined by anything except our choices. Your past isn't nearly as important as God's call on you today." The basis is to be faithful in the little things so we can hear God's call in the big things.

Week two focused on Sarah and the key passage of focus was Gen. 16:1-6. This is the story of Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham as a wife. The key point of the message was, "Selfish choices always spiral out of control, but Godly choices lead to eternal rewards." In the message, we tried to bring out the idea that Sarah's childless struggle became desperate. Only a desperate woman gives another woman to her husband. Then we showed that the choice spiraled out of control and in many ways is still out of control today. The key point came when we spent time talking about how little choices turn into big choices and if they are selfish ones, they will spiral out of control. We gave several contemporary examples of this.

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<sup>2</sup> To see the difference between the written manuscript and the spoken transcription, see the appendix.

Week three focused on a little known person in scripture, Demas. He is only mentioned three times in scripture, Phlm 24, Col 4:14, 2 Tim 4:10. These scriptures show that Demas was first a worker with Paul, then barely mentioned, and finally someone who had deserted Paul and probably the faith. Most commentaries seemed to agree with this progression: worker, barely around and then gone. The theme of this message was that “the downward slope is gradual and your direction always determines your destination.” The message focused on carelessness in our Christian walk and how that will determine where we are going regardless of what we say.

Each of these first three messages showed a progression that showed a basic flow. Your choices determine your greatness and little things matter, but if you begin to make selfish choices, they will spiral out of control, and that downward slope will determine your destination. These three messages each had a measure of hope in them, and were easily stand-alone sermons, but they also set the stage for the last message.

Finally, we came in with our fourth message on Matthew. The key passage for this message was Luk 5:27-32. This passage portrays Matthew holding a party with other “tax collectors and sinners” who need to meet Jesus. This message showed that no matter where you have been, you can turn around and come back to God, Matthew did. The key phrase for this message was that, “if our momentum is going the wrong way away from God, we need to make a 180 degree turn around to God.” The sermon showed how Matthew did that. The message also brought together the theme of the last three messages and concluded the series nicely.

At the beginning of week four, just at the half-way point of the team’s work, I walked into the room and said “thank you “ to the team by giving them each a \$25 Olive

Garden gift-card. This was part of my planned, “surprise” support for them. I wanted them to know that what they were doing was important, not to get tired, because we are about half-way through, and that their help was much appreciated. I knew I needed to say thank you in a tangible way, and that if I waited until the seven weeks were complete, I may have only half the crowd at the end.

Once the sermon series was completed, we did a focus group where a good cross-section of the congregation came together to determine what, if any, impact the messages had on the congregation. This focus group was a genuine cross section in age, time spent in this church, and male-female representation. Originally, I invited 20 people to be part of this focus group. In the end, 14 people took the time to attend the meeting and join the discussion. The facilitator of the meeting was the head elder at the Adventist Community Church. He is well respected within the congregation, but he also has strong ability to lead a good discussion in various venues around the church. No one who was on the focus group was on the sermon preparation team. The only stipulation given to participate in the focus group was that they must attend at least three of the four sermons in the series.

The night of the meeting, I came to the meeting to introduce what this was about, gave them a copy of the informed consent letter, which they were to sign before the meeting began. I thanked them for coming and helping in the process to better improve the preaching in this church and for helping me along with the doctoral project. Then I left and went to my office. The focus group met for just less than an hour and a half. The discussion started with a series of questions I had formed to get the discussion started. We also had a secretary in the room taking notes for the discussion and making the names

anonymous for the discussion participants to feel comfortable with the process. This was a different person than the secretary for the preparation team. Although I felt that person could do the job, the nature of the focus group demanded that they be allowed to speak openly. Therefore, I felt it necessary to get someone to take notes who was not related to me to sit in this room. The purpose of the focus group was to discuss if this sermon series was materially different from my previous sermons, to find out if they were significantly better or worse, and to measure the impact of the series on people in the congregation.

When the meeting was over, I retrieved copies of the signed “Informed Consent Letters” and made electronic copies of the notes from the secretary. Then I spent just a few minutes debriefing with the focus group facilitator to see how he thought it went. I uploaded the notes to Huddle, put the informed consent letters in my locked desk in my locked office.

The final thing I did was to sit down and write each team member a thank you note to let them know what their individual parts meant to me, how they helped the process and how much it helped me in the project. As we concluded our final team meeting, with a review of the process, each person sounded interested in doing something along these lines again. Each person saw holes and ways to make changes. We will discuss this review meeting in more detail in the next chapter.

After seven weeks of active work on the project, getting it ready for the various meetings, months of planning, and then the finality of preaching the final sermons and finishing up with the review of the team members and the focus group, the project came to its conclusion. We sought to clearly put into practice the ideas of collaboration as we understood them in 1 Cor 12-14 and believe we did so.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project document was to develop a method of sermon preparation that not only supported the work of the pastor, but also made the preached message clearer while utilizing other people's gifts in what has traditionally been the pastor's sole role. It is one thing to experiment. It is a completely different thing to measure that experiment's effectiveness. Many people want to do creative things, but in the end it is often difficult to measure whether the creative experiment worked or not. The real purpose in this chapter is to measure whether the project was more than creative. Was it effective? Did it work? Did it flop? Would I do it again? What parts worked and what did not? The analysis and evaluation of the project is the basis of this chapter.

It is my hope that honest and descriptive feedback on the outcome and evaluation will be most helpful in understanding whether this could be an ongoing help to preachers or even to me over the long haul. So far in many discussions with other preachers, they are very intrigued by the idea of a sermon team and it has created numerous discussions online and in person. Therefore, this honest and frank discussion presented in this chapter should continue the dialog and improvement of the idea of a collaborative sermon preparation team.

The research methodology used in this project organized a sermon preparation team at the Seventh-day Adventist Community Church of Vancouver, Washington. This

team put a four-part sermon series together called “Snapshots of Faith” with weekly meetings for seven weeks. After the sermons series a qualitative focus group was convened to discuss and analyze the quality of that particular sermon series, especially in relation to previous sermons preached. They discussed the keys to each message and evaluated the messages individually and corporately. Finally, there is a qualitative and quantitative survey of the sermon preparation team itself. They did not evaluate the sermons after preaching, but the preparation process to see if it worked and if it would be sustainable in the future.

Three basic questions were asked as this research progressed. Those three questions really form the basis of the outcomes. The first question is how will this sermon collaboration help or hinder the preacher? The second question is will this extra work on the message by the team members affect the congregation’s understanding of the message? Finally, the third question is how well will the sermon team hold up and is it sustainable? We will take a look at these one by one.

### **Effects on the Preacher**

Pulling a team of people together for anything out of the ordinary is a trial in and of itself. Finding a time when everyone could meet and on a day that could be regular throughout the process was difficult. The question I had to ask myself was, “Is this even worth it because of the amount of time it took to put together? Could this time have been better utilized in other areas of ministry, or even in normal sermon preparation?”

From my perspective, I saw the outcome extremely useful. I like nearly all aspects of preaching. I enjoy picking the text to preach, I enjoy studying the text and commentaries to find out the deeper meaning, I enjoy outlining a passage and I enjoy

preaching. What I find myself dreading is the actual writing of the manuscript. Yet, I write a manuscript almost every week even though I preach without notes. The manuscript is a thought producer and clarifier. So, I go through the work each week to get it done.

The process demanded that I spend more time in message preparation than previously spent. Before this research, I averaged around 10 hours to prepare a sermon. During this study, I averaged nearly 20 hours in each sermon (Appendix 2). This was accomplished because three weeks before the sermon I had to upload some study materials for team members who may not have such tools available for them. Two weeks before preaching it I produced a well-thought-out outline for the team members to analyze both online as well as during the team meetings. Then, one week before preaching the message I had to have a manuscript written. This manuscript needed to be uploaded to Huddle at least 24 hours before our weekly meeting, a full five days before I was to preach it.

Therefore, for me, having the team waiting for me to determine our weekly meeting agenda helped to discipline me and focus on my sermon preparation even when I did not feel like focusing on it. This alone, probably made it effective in a way that other methods in the past have not. One of my personal core values is, “Discipline will get me where I want to go.” This discipline with the accountability of a team waiting for me and asking questions was extremely helpful to me.

The process of spending two solid weeks truly focusing on the message and a third week at the beginning was energizing. It made me more aware of my work over that time frame and allowed me to see issues in the news, my own life, others’ lives and even

in the church as relating to the particular message. I was able to think through pieces of the message throughout the week and add to the pool of meaning as I went through the week. This is not only about the amount of time to work on each message, but also the time to percolate the messages in my own mind. This made for stronger messages.

They were better sermons because they explored the depth of the scripture passages more fully. This too, was an outcome from the team. Had they not been part of this process my depth is limited to my time, energy and my limited understanding. The team pulled together many thoughts, challenged each other's thoughts and settled on a meaning for the message.

One example of this was when we were doing the sermon on Demas. There are only three verses in the New Testament that talk about Demas. If you take them in the order they appear in the Bible, it appears as if Demas is first barely mentioned, then he grew to the stature of a worker with Paul and finally he ran away from the work. However one team member asked about the chronology of the texts and there were two schools of thought. One is as stated above, the other is as if the first mention of Demas's in scripture was of a solid worker, then he is barely mentioned and finally he abandoned the faith. We bantered this back and forth and finally settled on one because it made the most sense chronologically, but it also fit best with the idea we were presenting in the message.

The messages were also better because of a fuller understanding of my congregation. As we worked through each outline and each manuscript, we ended up clarifying issues that pertain to our congregation. This allowed for a stronger personal application portion of the messages. Having the team work together allowed for a



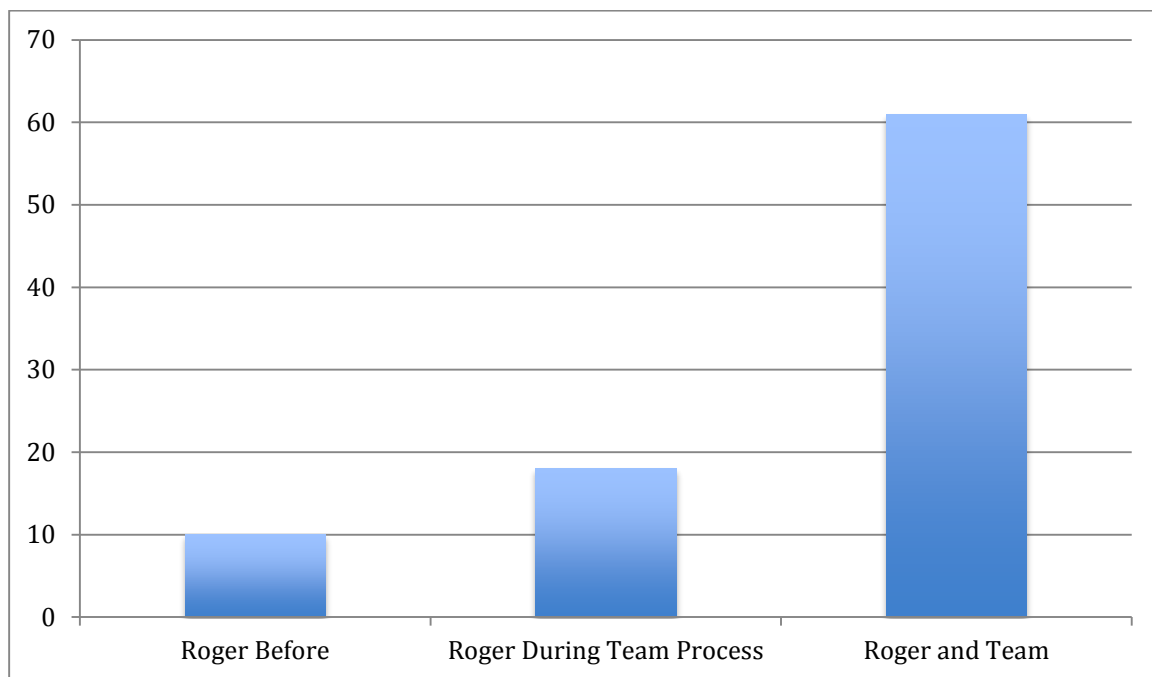
discussion on which issues to address, which to leave alone and why those fit our congregation best.

Better preparation translates indirectly into better delivery. When a message is prepared well, the message is clear, the authority it brings from the Bible is also clarified and the confidence with which the preacher steps into the pulpit grows.

Another way the sermon is better is because of the synergy in collaboration. The team allowed for a stronger creative atmosphere on the message. This added perspective of sharing thoughts brought up new ideas. Some of those ideas were not new, but had not been considered in this current context. One thought led to another thought and still another thought and culminated in the preaching (Redhat, 2009).

Finally, the amount of time spent on the messages made them stronger too. With all the demands of ministry still pressing in, I was shocked at how much time I put into each message. I have already mentioned above at how my time into each message nearly doubled. Besides the time I spent on each message, is the time that my team members spent on the messages. The combined effort into each message was nearly 61 hours into each sermon (Appendix 4).

Certainly some of the time spent on the weekly messages was group time, where we were simply working together. Yet, the exponential increase in time shown in the graph below had incredible ability to improve not only the development of the message, but also my ability to sit and write each message. Rather than dreading the writing process, I was excited and ready. Each of the four manuscripts flowed out of me with relative ease. It showed me that if my writing is struggling, then I probably need more time in the preparation stage.



*Figure 1. Time Spent on Sermons*

So, yes creating this team did take more time and energy to create and keep going, yet from my subjective experience, I would heartily engage in it again. From my estimation, it was well worth it. Certainly, I was able to ignore some of my usual routine because I knew this was a special short-term project. If I were going to continue this process, my weekly schedule would need some adjustments to accommodate a healthy balance with work and home. In the end, those adjustments would be smaller than I expected.

### **Effects on the Congregation**

According to one source, a focus group is a gathering of five to 15 people to highlight a discussion on a certain topic (Ammerman, 1998). The Focus Group we put

together was a key in measuring the sermons' effectiveness. The Focus Group knew these messages were going to be my doctoral project before I actually preached them. They also agreed to attend a minimum of three of the four messages in order to be on the Focus Group.

There was large agreement that messages in this sermon series were stronger than any previous series I had done before. They saw an obvious improvement in content and quality and gave me an average score of 8.5 on a 1-10 scale (Appendix 4).

According to the Focus Group's response, the messages were clearer. They were able to articulate the title, key protagonist in the message and the key point/catch-phrase of each message. Yet, for them the clarity went beyond just the over-arching message or theology of the message, it also went deeper into the life applications. In other words, they thought the messages reached a broad range of people's ages, Christian walk and yet were specific enough to speak to the people in the pews.

The overwhelming response from the Focus Group was very affirming and positive. However, when I read their anonymous comments I realized again that members come to the worship service with very high expectations regarding preaching. This makes it even more clear that we cannot preach other people's sermons, downloaded on a Friday afternoon from a subscription website, we cannot preach our last congregation's messages, but we owe it to our congregation to preach current, relevant and well-crafted messages that pertain to them and their situation today. People really are listening. They really do expect it to speak to them. They actually do want to see life-change come out of their time in worship.

The Focus Group affirms this because they brought out the idea that my sermons

speak to them personally. Certainly, I started with a friendly audience, but they said there was a difference in these messages. These messages were more clearly presented with more passion and the ideas were stronger.

This is a direct result of the collaborative team process. As we looked deep into the passages, sought to exegete the congregation as Tisdale formulates (Tisdale, 1997) and processed this together the messages got stronger. The combined effort helped me to speak more to the individual and his or her needs.

However, at least one member of the focus group listened well enough to speak to needed improvement in one of the sermons. This group noted that the amount of time and energy in these messages would probably not continue after this series. Who has time to put 61 hours into a sermon each week? This is a valid question. Once you hit four home runs in a row, then what happens next? Considering this was a cause for concern, but also a rallying cry to continue the process.

### **Effects on the Collaborative Team**

The cumulative effect of the team working together brought about a degree of true synergy. Different people brought out different aspects of the passages. This happened through their life experience, their different study paths and by their understanding of the congregation. This synergistic effect was amazing as it came down to the whole being greater than the sum of the individual parts (Dictionary, 2002).

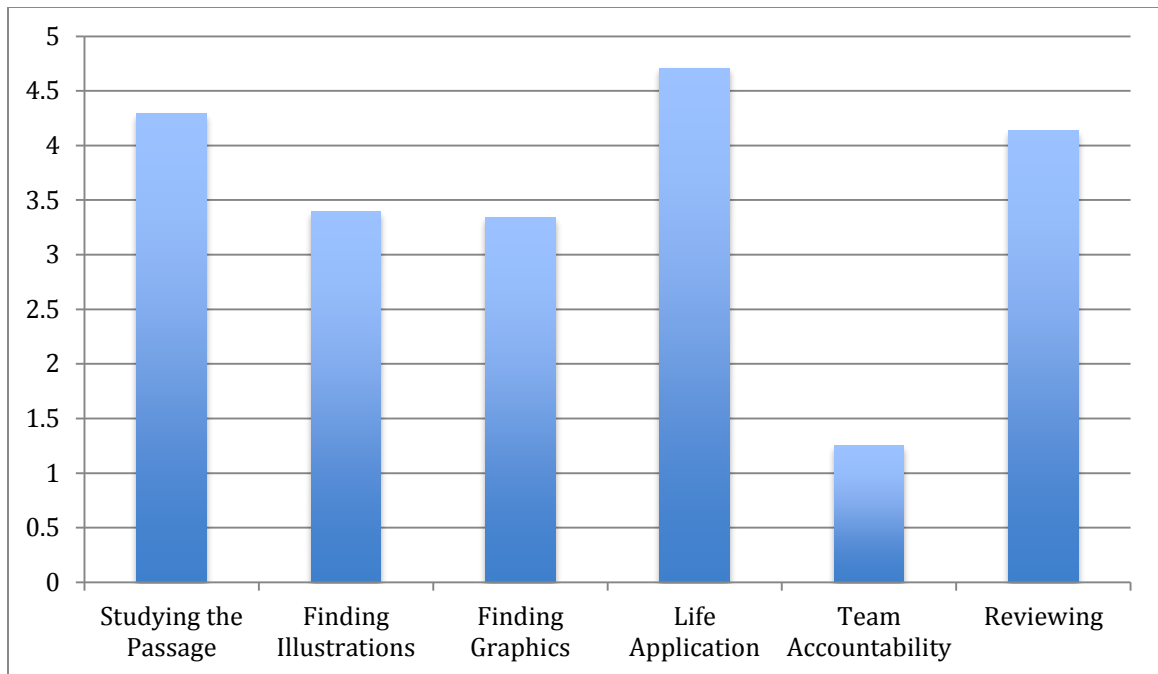
Some team members were able to only put in a bare minimum of time. Others put in an amazing amount of time into each message. The average amount of time for a team member to put into a sermon was about 2 hrs 30 minutes in a single week (excluding myself). The lowest anyone put into a sermon on any week was a single hour and that

included the time he or she put into the team meeting. The greatest amount of time spent by a team member, excluding myself, was nearly 12 hours in one week.

Each person decided where to spend his or her time in regards to helping build the sermon. Clearly, the largest portion of time went to working on the life application portion of the message. In a self-scored survey of their priorities, the team scored the strongest on this aspect of life application. This clearly relates back to some of the training I did in the beginning when we talked about exegeting the congregation (Tisdale, 1997). This also reflected my previous preaching style as well as my congregation's desire for a practical gospel message.

This is a crucial aspect of sermon preparation in my opinion. It seems that preachers could spend too much time on lofty ideas and never bring it back down to Monday morning when people get on with real life. Ideally for me, I was able to help my team members see the importance of applying scripture to every day life. They took that concept and ran with it to keep my messages alive and functioning well.

Second place finish for priorities landed on the study portion of the passage as shown in Figure 2 below. This time in study, in the passage, excited team members. Most of the team members had some kind of theological/exegetical training. One member's access to studying the passage was from the commentary and version information I uploaded online on Huddle.net. Yet, this particular team member enjoyed the reading and took part in the discussion. No one felt he did not know what he was talking about just because he did not have the same resource ability.



*Figure 2. Where Team Spent Time*

I believe over time, I would have continued to train the team in methods of study and would have moved the group to study as much as they were willing to make comments on the text. In other words, with a longer-term system, we would have done more training, more feedback and more accountability. We did not do enough of any of those three things.

Of the training I provided, on a 1-4 scale, it scored a three from almost everyone. There are two ways to interpret this. First, it could be that I did not do as good of a job training them to exegete the text and use the online tools as I should have. More likely is the second reason, that most of my team were already online savvy and exegetically trained. They already had experience in this area of writing sermons. I would have had to significantly raise the bar on the training. Chances are, I could not compete with the

training many of these received in their college years with the few hours I was able to provide. This second scenario seems much more likely.

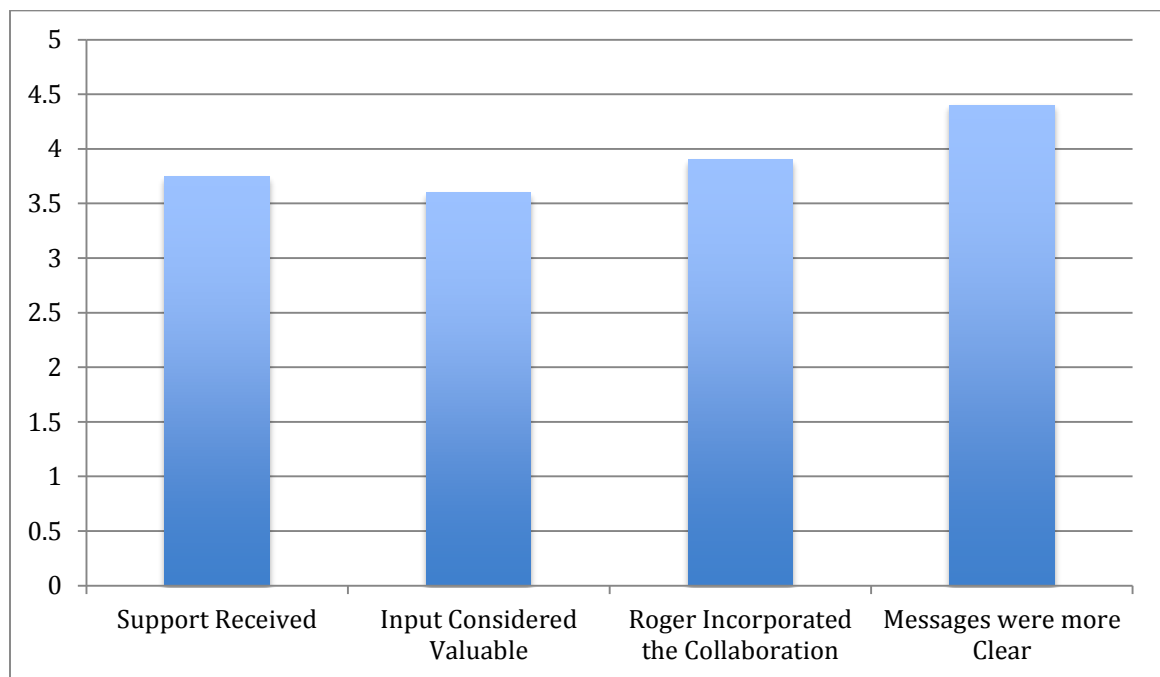
However, this was to my advantage. Not including myself, three of my team members were theologically trained from undergraduate through seminary. Another was trained in undergraduate work. Still another is a regular speaker who if he/she does not exegete the text well, will quit being invited to speak. This allowed me to shorten the training needed, yet give enough for others on the team to get up to speed and begin. It actually saved me time in the team meetings. Yet, it could have short-changed the one person who was not in the prior-trained category in the weekly meetings. I do not believe it did short-change him; rather it helped him grow as he listened and digested what others were doing.

Third place was fascinating, because we spent less than 15 minutes each week reviewing the message, whereas we spent over an hour each week studying the passage. The review process consisted of nothing more than random thoughts and brainstorming. It was nothing consistent with a system. I do not understand why they thought they spent so much time in reviewing, except to make a simple interpretation. They must have felt it was more important in the process than I was giving them time for and this could be determined to be a statement of worth, more than a statement of time.

This review process needs to be stronger in the next go around. Clearly, if a sermon process is going to work, a team will need to spend more time on reviewing what they produced and should probably be part of any preacher's toolkit whether or not the collaborative preparation team is utilized. We only learn by understanding what works and what does not. The regular review opens doors for understanding what happened,

why it happened and where change needs to take place.

In the end, I had the team rate the process with these four questions. Did I support you well? Was your input considered valuable by the rest of the team? Did Roger incorporate the collaborative effort? Were the messages more clear because of the collaborative effort? Their scores are seen below in Figure 3.

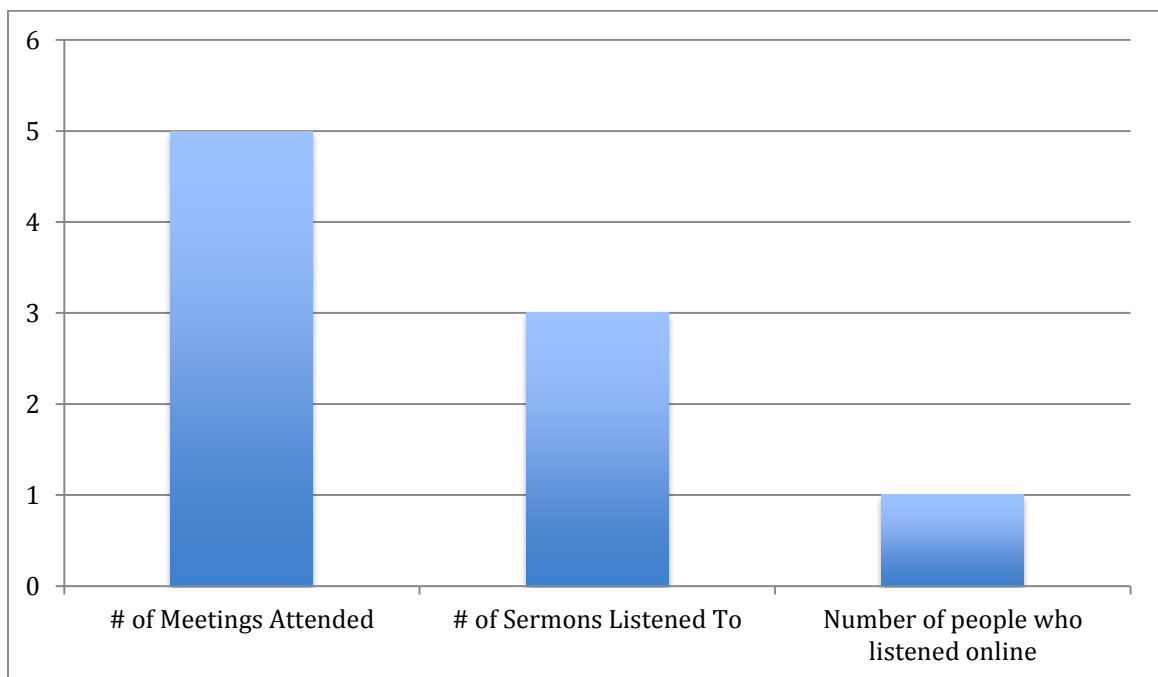


*Figure 3.* Team Process – Self Scored

Overall, the team believed the process was strong. Only one team member was not sure if he would do it again, but he still believed it was a valuable tool. He was reflecting on the amount of time and energy put into this to make it work. Yet, the team members felt like the collaboration worked and the process was useful. On a scale of one to four, the average score was 3.71 for a grade on our collaborative effort.



On average, individual members attended five of our seven meetings (see Figure 4 below). Only one person, beside me, attended all seven meetings. This was typical of any church having to deal with busy people. The process was designed in such a way and the team large enough that it was easy to accommodate this fluctuation. I did say they needed to be there at least five of the seven meetings and needed to be present for at least three of the four sermons, or listen to them online. Only two people actually listened to every message. One person took the time to listen online so he would know what he missed.

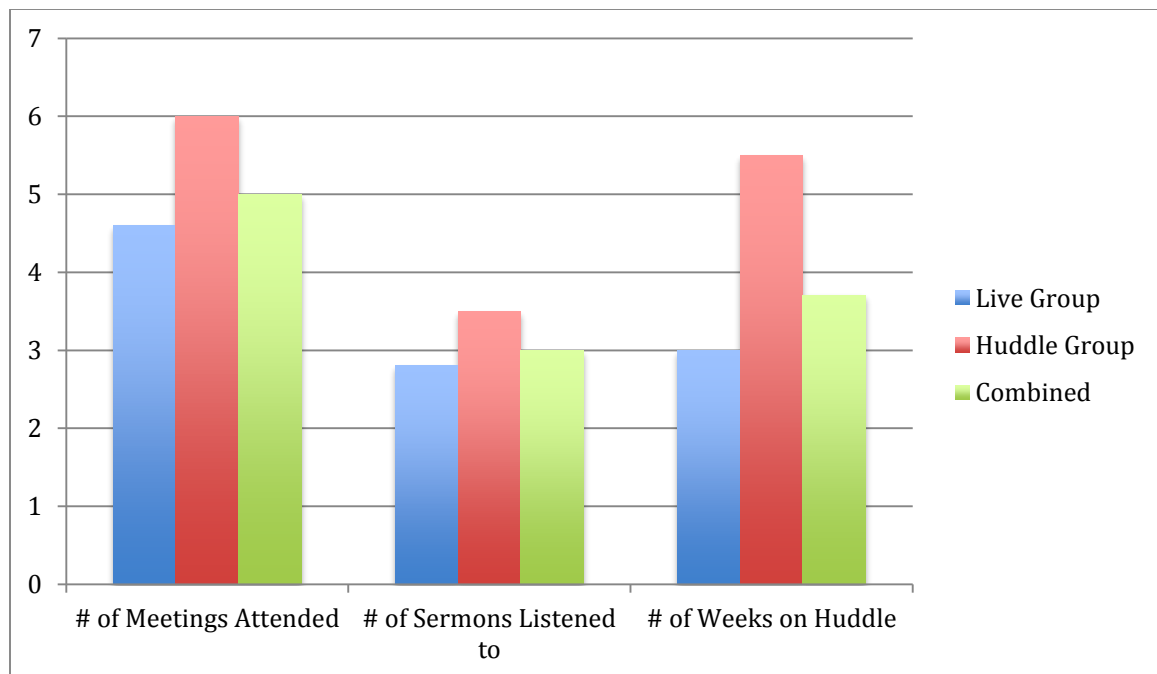


*Figure 4. Team Involvement*

The use of Huddle was a unique part of this study. It was my goal to see if the collaboration would work better online, or in person. It was my hope that people would find the use of Huddle a more beneficial use of time where in a long-term process, perhaps we would not need to meet as often in person. I imagined a world of collaboration going on without requiring any weekly meetings. This was not to be.

Of the two people who only met with us online, they believed their input was just as utilized and just as valuable. In addition, their response shows a stronger involvement than those who met in person.

Clearly, the Huddle Group showed a stronger interest and stronger support of the process, but this is a bit diminished by the fact that there were only two of them. What we really see going on here is that those who were in the Huddle Group alone, saw this as their only opportunity to support the message and collaborate with the team, so they made sure and logged in and got involved (see Figure 5 below). The group that was the Live Group, did not take Huddle as seriously because they felt less need to do so. Whether they logged in or not, their voice would be heard at the next team meeting. This was the great divide between the two concepts: The Huddle Group only had that medium, whereas the Live Group felt like using Huddle was second best.



*Figure 5. Group Involvement*

Those in the Huddle Group felt fine with the process and were thankful to be a part of the process. However, those in the Live Group felt like they did not really get to hear the whole message from those in the Huddle Group. One person, expressed it this way,

I think the online participants (only) lose something by not being present. I think it would be better if most could come in person most of the time. (I didn't feel as connected to their comments, and in the discussion group those comments weren't remembered or referred to much. But perhaps they were more helpful to the Pastor.) (Appendix 3)

These comments raise another interesting point. Is this more about connecting with the other team members or more about the task of the sermon? This person, above, would likely not separate the two, but sees them intricately intertwined in the overall process. This team member is stating that being part of the team helps the team

collaborate more effectively. She felt there were good ideas expressed online that should have been championed in the meetings.

### **Recommendations**

Eventually the project came to a completion. Yet, the scope, limitations and time frame of this project leaves one to ask, “What next?” After investigating what I believed to be areas of growth for the sermon process, I see other areas where others could pick up from here and move forward with this study.

My first recommendation would be to see this study replicated in a longitudinal study. This could be done in as few as four to six 4-sermon series, or as many as a whole year’s worth of sermons. Second, to find a way to measure the sermons before the collaboration and measure against the same criteria after the teamwork. This measurement would likely need to be accomplished with the same focus group, but not necessarily. Third, I would suggest someone put together criteria to pick a team, which would involve selective use of certain gifts and creating a balanced team. The team members are crucial to the process. Is there a more exact science to picking these team members? Fourth, I believe someone should find a way to find, support and evaluate a team of volunteers. To be able to understand what would keep them motivated and involved in the process, while still improving their involvement through evaluation would be an invaluable resource to many areas of the church. The fifth recommendation I have would be for someone to define a sermon review process where a collaborative team, or a pastor by himself could review and grow the sermon by evaluating it after the preaching moment. Finally, I would like to see if someone could evaluate Rainer’s argument (Rainer, 2001) that the sermon is the key reason for people coming back to church. Can

this be duplicated and does it make a difference with a collaborative team?

This project document has brought out the need for higher quality messages on a weekly basis. Therefore, my final recommendation comes in regard to getting this information into the hands of not only preachers, but also lay members/elders who in our smaller churches could benefit from a round-table collaborative approach to sermon preparation. Often people who must preach don't have enough time to put together a quality sermon and when they do preach, never get the opportunity for evaluation of their message.

Although the team approach may take more time, emphasis needs to focus on the quality of the message and the ability to connect better with the audience. There are other side benefits that could be drawn out as well: a reproducible system for learning and understanding scripture, building disciples, training other people to preach, letting others utilize their spiritual giftedness. These should over-ride the unease someone may have about putting more time together to pull a team of people together. Although, certainly, the one doing the preaching doesn't necessarily have to be the one in charge of the team members. This could be done by a separate volunteer as well.

My recommendations include putting the team preparation concept into curriculums in college and seminary, and that this be written about in magazine articles, blogs and newsletters so that a wider audience might be able to discover the idea, the how to's and various ways to implement a collaborative team in their setting.

## **Conclusions**

At least two sources mentioned in Chapter 3 rotate people through their teams as a way to keep them fresh and encouraged (Smith, 2010; Young, 2008). At the time of

development of this research study it seemed like a lot of extra work to invite, train and maintain momentum towards the task by bringing in different teams along the way. Yet, as I look back on it, I think having the same team who always works on the messages together may only work with a paid staff of people for whom it is part of their job description. When Dave Ferguson (Duduit, 2009) does it, his specific reason for doing it is that his multiple site church requires a live preacher at a majority of the sites. Therefore, he needs people to help build the message so it is their message and not his alone.

I now believe that a volunteer base will get worn out. The process was intense. Even though I made sure and came up with tangible support in expected and unexpected ways, most were ready for a break after seven weeks. Almost all of them said they would do it again. Having a volunteer base almost requires an ebb and flow of the team members when they get involved in something extra like helping the pastor prepare sermons. They still have real jobs to do, other ministry functions to do and busy lives to live. Thus, a regular “changing of the guard” seems like a better way to do this process if you are using volunteers.

Perhaps one of the strongest ideas I learned was about the amount of time and how much it affects a sermon’s quality. During this process, I essentially doubled the amount of time I put into a normal sermon. I not only found the process beneficial, but also found it did two things for me: 1) it made the writing easier, and 2) showed me that I really do have that kind of time available.

In the end, this process took away my excuses for procrastinating about writing and it also took away my excuse that I did not have more time to spend in sermon

preparation. These discoveries were serendipitous, as I never expected either of them. Indeed, the extra study I put in and the extra material from the team made writing a breeze by comparison to my normal week. This alone was worth the time I put into this research.

Fortunately, that was not all I found. The crucial piece I was looking for at the beginning of the research was what I expected. People were able to use their gifts. They enjoyed using their gifts and felt it was meaningful ministry. Yet, not only did they feel its importance, so did I and so did the congregation. The messages had more impact. Truly allowing people to be creative and utilize their giftedness in every area of the church is the right design for ministry.

The sermon should not be the sole decision of the pastor. We are unwilling to let the pastor make all the board decisions, all the children's ministry decisions or all the outreach decisions. Therefore, why would we not take this vitally important task and let the team build it too? Clearly, there needs to be a leader in the church. A leader is someone who is called to cast the vision, set the stage, inspire and equip the saints. However, a leader is not called to do all the ministry in the church, nor is he or she called to do the job all alone. The calling of the gifts in 1 Cor 12-14 is about collaborative teams.

It is my desire to take this approach to sermon preparation a part of my regular routine in my church. I plan on developing at least four teams of people, with some cross-over as to who is on them. I will begin there and see if that is enough rotation, too much, or how it will work. I am excited to continue to move this forward and continue to strengthen the concept of people using their gifts at every level of the church and the

pastor no longer going it alone. Regardless of how some felt, different methods work for different people. I will still use a combination of online and live meetings. Both methods increased the pool of meaning that went into the message. My team is also excited about beginning again. Although my congregation does not know it, I believe they will appreciate it also.



## APPENDIX A

### Sermons

Following this page are the four sermons in manuscript form which I produced for my sermon preparation team on Monday of the week I would preach it. They then had 24 hours to go over it, critique it, break it apart if needed. At our team meeting we made changes, developed the thoughts further, but I never rewrote the manuscripts./

If you would like to compare the messages in their original manuscript from the actual preaching, you may listen to the sermons as they were preached at these links below:

**Sermon #1:** *Snapshots of Faith: Elijah (2011-06-11)*

[http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media\\_entries/14529](http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media_entries/14529)

**Sermon #2:** *Snapshots of Faith: Sarah (2011-06-18)*

[http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media\\_entries/14531](http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media_entries/14531)

**Sermon #3:** *Snapshots of Faith: Demas (2011-06-25)*

[http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media\\_entries/14533](http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media_entries/14533)

**Sermon #4:** *Snapshots of Faith: Matthew<sup>3</sup> (2011-07-02)*

[http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media\\_entries/14535](http://www.vancouveradventist.com/podcasts/1396/media_entries/14535)

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<sup>3</sup> Pieces of the Matthew Parable section of this sermon are an adaptation of a message I heard Bill Hybels preach many years ago at Willow Creek Community Church, that date of which I do not remember.

**Sermon #1**– Snapshots of Faith: Elijah

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 18:32-35

**Thesis:** Fullness of Faith is determined by your choices / Your past isn't nearly as important as God's call on you.

**ME:** As a kid, when I didn't have anyone to play with, I would play by myself. I would get my hockey stick out and pretend I was Bobby Orr skating defense for the Boston Bruins. Sometimes I would get my baseball glove out and a tennis ball and throw it against the wall pretending I was picking up grounders at Third base for the Baltimore Orioles, as if I was Brooks Robinson.

I wanted to be someone great! I wanted to do great things. And the best way I knew how as a child was to just become those who were already great – in my mind.

**WE:** I think there's a part of us all that we'd like to be someone great. There's still a bit of romance within each of us that would like to make front page headlines...er...for good reasons, not because we accidentally ran over someone, or because we were robbed, or because we said we were accosted...like that lady who threw acid on herself last year. She not only got her 15 minutes of fame, but some big trouble too....

But what do you do if you aren't great? What do you do if you aren't anybody in particular of name, of job, or anywhere else? What if you grew up on the wrong side of the tracks and never were part of the really in crowd – in school, in work situations, or even in church????

**GOD:** Fortunately for us, the Bible gives us a really powerful story to talk about this issue. What if you are a regular guy/girl?

The story of Elijah brings us into the mix in 1 Kings 18. Elijah steps into the Biblical picture into a divided Kingdom. One people – the Israelites – but they had been divided into two kingdoms. Ahab was king with a wife by the inglorious name of Jezebel. The King is heathen in practice, but still God's chosen and as the saying says, "So goes the leader, so goes the people." By-and-large, the people had followed their king into Baal worship.

Not only was the kingdom divided, but the people were divided in their thinking as well. God's chosen King had led them into other gods. They knew they were God's chosen people, but they weren't following it. They were divided between two choices.

Go with me to 1 Kings 17:1

**17** Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (1 Ki 17:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Read the story again, and you will discover Elijah appeared on the scene like a superhero coming to the rescue. Yet we know so little about where he came from and how he came to be God's instrument to confront the powerful and wicked King Ahab. Interestingly, the writer of 1 Kings gives only his name and his town of origin. He blows into history like a tornado, without credential or reputation.<sup>5</sup>

Elijah steps into scripture with this scene. Elijah the Tishbite. He was from Tishbe. Commentators are in pretty much agreement that Although they know the general direction of where Gilead is, they do not know exactly where Tishbe is. If it was an important place, it would have been well known and we could find it today. We know it's east of the Jordan River – so Elijah was probably from one of the Eastern tribes. But one commentator even believes Israel had fallen so far, that God had to call an Ishmaelite to do his work. That's probably not likely, but it does serve to help us see that Elijah wasn't coming from one of the powerful tribes, he wasn't well known, and other than how he bursts onto the scene, we really don't know much about him.

And this brings us to an amazing reality: Greatness isn't determined by anything but your choices. Your past isn't nearly as important as God's call on you today.

We have a tendency to view Elijah as one of the great ones. We know he went out in a flaming chariot to heaven. We know that he did some really great things. But who was he before this time – we really have no knowledge. But we have this word from one author, that gives us a glimpse of what it was probably like. She writes, in a book called *Prophets and Kings*,

Among the mountains of Gilead, east of the Jordan, there dwelt in the days of Ahab a man of faith and prayer whose fearless ministry was destined to check the rapid spread of apostasy in Israel. Far removed from any city of renown, and occupying no high station in life, Elijah the Tishbite nevertheless entered upon his mission confident in God's purpose to prepare the way before him and to give him abundant success. The word of faith and power was upon his lips, and his whole life was devoted to the work of reform.<sup>6</sup>

Elijah's choices determined where in life he was going. At least at one point in time, he thought he was the only servant of God. He thought Jehovah had no servants except himself. He understood, incorrectly, that he was all alone. And even though he was wrong, it shows what his character was really like. Even though everyone around him was choosing Baal worship, he did not. Even though everyone else was going the wrong direction, he was never swayed by peer pressure.

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<sup>5</sup> Bisagno, J. R. (2002). *Principle preaching : How to create and deliver purpose driven sermons for life applications* (62). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>6</sup> White, E. G. (1917; 2002). *The Story of Prophets and Kings as Illustrated in the Captivity and Restoration of Israel; Conflict of the Ages Series, Volume 2; Prophets and Kings* (118). Pacific Press Publishing Association.

He was always faithful in the small things in the past. Because of those past choices, he was called to the greatness that was beginning in this chapter of scripture.

That says a lot about Elijah as a man. He made principled choices because that was the way he lived. Those choices prepared him to do what he was about to do next. His next move was to walk boldly walk into the Oval Office of His day – unannounced, unescorted, and unplanned by the political brass.

God doesn't care about your pedigree at all. God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called. You don't have to be afraid of what your past is or what your past isn't. Many of us made mistakes in our past that we would like to have forgotten. Making the right choices today is just as important today to overcome our past. Greatness doesn't come from birth, but from choices. And God can qualify our lack of greatness. He can also qualify us despite our mistakes. That's called grace.

His bold pronouncement was shocking in it's effects. He waltzes in, declares a famine is about to come on the land and disappears. After Ahab and his many so-called wise men and counselors picked their jaws up off the floor someone finally asked, "Who was that?" The King says, "Go get that guy and bring him back here. He can't just walk in here and do that. Go get him!"

And for three years, Elijah hid. First at a brook, secondly in the city of Zeraphath. When he finally comes out of hiding, three years later, he tells Obadiah to tell the king to gather all the prophets of Baal up on Mt. Carmel for a showdown. This is going to be bigger than the showdown at the OK Corral by a long ways. 450 Prophets of Baal and 1 Prophet of God.

As residents of big cities, some of us have not seen the majesty displayed nightly in the heavens for a long time. Have you ever noticed that the darker the night, the brighter the light shines, and that light always defeats darkness? I'm convinced that God loves dark places, because in those moments His light and love can shine the brightest. Israel was a dark place in the days of Elijah, but the darkness of the hour was the perfect backdrop against which God could reveal His power.

The confrontation on Mount Carmel was not merely a battle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal; it was an opportunity for God to remind His people one more time that He alone was God, and that they must have no other.<sup>7</sup>

Once everyone is together, Elijah offers the challenge – The ESV says, "How long will you go limping between two opinions." In other words, you aren't function at full capacity because of your wavering between God and Baal. So, set up two altars and the G/god who answers by fire is the true God.

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<sup>7</sup> Bisagno, J. R. (2002). *Principle preaching : How to create and deliver purpose driven sermons for life applications* (63). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

This is interesting – 1 Kings 18:21 – the people said nothing. These may be some of the saddest words in the Bible. They voted by their silence. Elijah is standing alone in front of 450 prophets of Baal, the King and his entourage and then the crowd of people who had gathered to see the showdown.

Elijah must have felt like the enemy. It's one thing to speak to a crowd of people – most people don't even want to do that. Then to speak to a crowd of 1000 or more people – maybe upwards of 10,000 people. That's huge. And then to stand alone – to be the enemy, speaking to a hostile crowd. Elijah stood up and did the right thing, even when it was hard....

450 prophets of Baal dancing around the altar and praying. It's quite a scene and it lasted all day. It got bloody as they cut themselves, it was a satanic, bloody, screaming frenzy.

Baal is the sky god. He was the one that was in control of the fire, the rain, the clouds, the sun and all that. If it came from the sky – it was from Baal.

But the 450 prophets knew. We are told that they continued to try to sneak fire on the altar, but Elijah knew and kept an ever watchful eye on the situation. They had backed themselves into a corner.

What keeps people in the crowd and not standing up for the right? Why do people stay silent in the small things. It affects them in the large things too? What keeps us from standing up? What keeps us silent?

V. 27 – at the mid-day point, Elijah began to mock them. Where's your god? I thought you said he was in charge of the sky? Shout louder, maybe he's resting and needs to be woke up.

Satan and his angels were present at Carmel and would have done anything within their power to bring down the desired fire had this been permitted by God. But the Lord, although allowing the demons to exhibit some of the more revolting aspects of their presence in men, did not allow Satan to bring down fire in the name of Baal.<sup>8</sup>

V. 29 – at the end of the day, no one noticed that it was time for the evening sacrifice.

The LXX. has a curious variation and addition here: “And Elijah the Tishbite said to the prophets of the idols, Stand back; I will now make ready my offering.”<sup>9</sup>

1 Kings 18:<sup>32</sup>With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. <sup>33</sup>He arranged the

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<sup>8</sup> Nichol, F. D. (1978; 2002). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 2* (819). Review and Herald Publishing Association.

<sup>9</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary: 1 Kings*. 2004 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.) (424). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”

<sup>34</sup>“Do it again,” he said, and they did it again.

“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. <sup>35</sup>The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

<sup>36</sup>At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed:

“LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. <sup>37</sup>Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

<sup>38</sup>Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

<sup>39</sup>When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!”<sup>10</sup>

Think about this. God had already been working hard to save his people. This was an attention getter to bring people to their knees in submission. It happened, because one normal man answered the call.

What would have happened if 2, 3 or 4 people would have stood with Elijah when the call was given – before the fire? God longs for a people who don’t need a miracle to be faithful.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:39 that only an evil people look for a sign or a miracle before they will believe. Where are you? Do you need a miracle? Do you need something big? Or are you faithful to God right now?

What does it take to have the kind of explicit trust in God? What does it take to hold on in steadiness? What does it take to stand alone, if need be? What does it take to be independent on the world, but dependent upon God?

Luke 16:10 – <sup>10</sup>“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. <sup>11</sup>So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup>And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?

<sup>13</sup>“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”<sup>11</sup>

If you take the money out of the situation – what else are we serving? Are we trying for fame? Are we trying to be the best we can be? Are we trying to be noticed in the way we

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<sup>10</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (1 Ki 18:31–39). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>11</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Lk 16:10–13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

dress, the way we act, or the things we say? Or are we hiding in the crowd hoping no one will notice?

How did Elijah become one of the most steady and honest people in the Bible? How did he stand up to 450 prophets of Baal? How did he call fire down from heaven?

He was faithful in the little things.

I heard a story on the Way-FM on Monday of this week. A guy buys a house and in that house he finds \$25,000 in cash! He finds the previous owner and he gives it back to him because he wanted to set a right example for his kids. That's huge....

But to be honest (pun intended) He didn't make that call because he'd been keeping the dimes he was overpaid periodically. He was able to make that big choice, because of the small choices.

Could that be said of you today? Would you be honest with people's cash?  
Are you honest to your spouse in your relationship and your attractions online and offline?

Are you prepared to wait your turn in line, even when you are in a hurry?

(this part) could use some help....

What does the Congregation need to hear here?

What are the needs we're talking to?

What else is happening?)

### **Conclusion Story:**

I read a story the other day from a preacher outside of this area that had a sermon entitled, *"You Could Have God, but You Chose Light Beer!"*

He's simply trying to say, we give up our faithfulness for such transient things.

- Esau gave up his birthright for a pot of stew
- We'll sacrifice our marriage for a picture on our computer screen
- We'll sell our souls by taking home something from work that doesn't belong to us
- We no longer seek to guard the edges of the Sabbath and prepare for it
- It's no longer an issue of honesty, it's honesty in the right places

Paul says in the NT that if you want to see your life changed and others around you, that you have to live for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). We have to start asking ourselves, WWJD. Will this glorify God if I take this pencil home from work? Will it glorify God if I visit those sites on the internet?

You may miscarry, get divorced, get cancer, get fired, or be left friendless. You may end up paying more than you wanted, missing a great opportunity, or be shunned by people – all because you want to be faithful in little things. But you can do it – you can glorify God. Jesus did.

*To every person there comes in their lifetime that special moment when you are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to you and your talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds you unprepared or unqualified for work which could have been your finest hour.” - Sir Winston Churchill*



**SERMON #2:** Snapshots of Faith: Sarai

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 16:1-6

**THEME:** Selfish Choices always spiral out of control, but Godly Choices Lead to eternal rewards

**Intro:** John Edwards. What does that name do for you? Do you think of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Preacher who preached some pretty hell-fire sermons? Do you think of the former presidential candidate? The former Vice-presidential running mate? Or do you think of the man who has just been indicted for improperly using campaign funds to cover up an affair with a woman he had a child with while his wife was dying of cancer?

Arnold Schwarzenegger (sp?) was Mr. Universe, An actor, and noted for groping women before he was elected the governor of California. Now he is separated from his wife of 20 some years.

If you turn on the news long enough, you will see some new face, in some new scandal. It really doesn't feel so much like news, but more like gossip. It's all really a testimony to show us that selfish choices always spiral out of control.

That selfish attitude doesn't have to be sexual in nature. It can be about food, about money, about relationships, about your work, or about anything.

**WE:** Have you ever done something you know is wrong, but your attitude is, "just this once won't really hurt me"? Has that, "just this once" turned into an ugly addiction in your life? Has it spiraled out of control?

I have a friend that made a choice when the internet was young, to do something he had basically never done before, and he said, "I wonder if playboy has a website." Sure enough, it did, and thus began an addiction that was nearly unbreakable after it had spiraled out of control for just a few months.

I watched a YouTube video on Sunday afternoon with my wife and it showed what a small indulgence kind of thing can do for people. Just one 12 oz can of soft-drink a day, will lead to 15 excess pounds a year. A little indulgence can go a long ways actually.

Sometimes our choices come from our anxiety. Sometimes our choices come from our need to indulge ourselves. Sometimes our choices come from principle. But often they come from more basal, selfish desires within us. Selfish choices (can so often?/always?) spiral out of control, but Godly choices lead to eternal rewards.

So often, selfish choices aren't run by God before they are put into action.

Abram and Sarai were those kind of people. People who sometimes made selfish choices that drew them out of God's will and often spiraled out of control. One of their bad choices they had to make twice before they learned not to do it, and that was to lie about

their relationship to kings whom they feared. They stopped that at some point in time, but not before they ingrained it in their son to try it later too.

Sometimes we think we can break God's laws to our advantage. Sometimes we get to thinking that situational ethics is a good thing. Sometimes we begin to think that "just this once" is okay.

Abram and Sarai were promised a son. Every time they were given that promise, there must have been all kinds of questions about the promise. But there was also a call to follow in faith. Sarai must have thought all along the way that the promise of son was going to include her. But at some point in time, she may have noticed that the promise was given to Abram and she was never named as part of that promise. Then she made a choice – a selfish choice to fix the problem, a choice that wasn't run by God before it was put into action.

**GOD:** Go with me to the book of Genesis 16:1-6

**16** Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar; <sup>2</sup>so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my servant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. <sup>3</sup>So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian servant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. <sup>4</sup>He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.<sup>12</sup>

Wow! What does it take for a woman to give her husband another woman? Does that look like a selfish plan? Or was it an act of selflessness – helping him have children, since she obviously couldn't?

Three people are in this scenario. Hagar is a servant who was probably a gift from the king of Egypt when they went there in Chapter 12. Hagar is young and fertile. She was officially Sarai's servant. Sarai, was the instigator of this incident. She is old and barren. In that culture, the strength and image of woman came from her children. A woman that was unable to have children was a woman who felt the scorn and taunting of those in her society. Yet her name mocked her. Sarai means, "My Princess." It's a name for someone special. It's a name for someone who holds a great place in society. Her husband, Abram, means "Exalted Father."

Sarai must have felt ridicule, shame, and discouragement. Her self-image must have been at the very lowest. So, she made a choice.

Imagine going to the village well to gather water and all the mothers have their kids with them, and she has none. Imagine the ladies getting together for lunch and everyone is

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<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Ge 16:1-4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

talking about their kids. Those who haven't struggled to have kids, don't know the hidden pain of those who have been unable to have them. Those who don't know the longing, the ache, and the pain don't fully understand Sarai's desperation. Those of you who have struggled understand. You know the ache. You know the pain. You understand the desperation for children.

I have a friend who when he and his wife couldn't have kids they went to fertility testing. He said, he wouldn't even like to talk about the things they made him do. Only a desperate person does that. Only a desperate woman gives her husband another woman....

This wasn't a choice of selflessness to allow her husband to have a son to carry on the family name. This was a desperate choice to take away her humiliating shame.

Desperate choices often lead to outcomes we are not aware of though. Desperate choices, selfish choices, usually spiral out of control into ways that we have never thought of before. When people make choices out of frustration, out of desperation, out of selfishness, they really don't see the consequences of those choices. And they are often misled on what they think is the outcome.

This about this for a moment. What kind of choice was this that Sarai was making? Where did it lead? Go back with me to Genesis 16:

<sup>4</sup>He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

<sup>5</sup>Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

<sup>6</sup>"Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.<sup>13</sup>

This was a That was made out of selfish ambition. God wasn't consulted. Where would it have led if they had taken the time to talk, pray and listen BEFORE they acted? Where did this choice lead?

- It pitted Abram against his wife
- It pitted Sarai against her servant
- It ultimately pitted Abram against his son, Ismael
- It later pitted Ismael and Isaac against each other
- Still today, those consequences are going that same direction with the Arabs and Israel still fighting.

Selfish choices always spiral out of control. We can't even imagine the consequences. But Godly choices lead to an eternal reward.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Ge 16:4-6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Polygamy was common in those days. It was the culturally accepted thing to do. If your wife can't have kids, take another wife. It wasn't right, it wasn't good, it always leads to disruption of the family, but it was culturally acceptable.

Abram and Sarai had been called out of the culture. They had been called to make the hard choices that weren't like those they grew up around. They were called away from being like everyone else. They were God's chosen people. They were being called into the ways of God.

**YOU:** Would you ever take that kind of step? You wouldn't give your husband another woman, would you? You wouldn't let your wife have another man, right? I mean, that was dumb. Right?

But look at what we do today. We say we wouldn't do that, but what do we do today that is culturally acceptable, but just as wrong? I'm not talking about Sarai's choice to give her servant to Abram. But I'm talking about the things we know are just as wrong for our walk with God. We don't pray about it. We don't consult anyone about it – least of all our spiritual mentors, we just do them, because we know they are socially acceptable. We just know them to be right in people's eyes, even if they are stretching the edges of our personal walk with God in the wrong direction.

What am I talking about?

- White Lies – we tell lies so that we don't hurt people's feelings. How do you like my dress dad? Well...It looks okay Johnny.... Come on! Tell the truth!
- We know we should have family worship. We want to raise spiritual kids. But I mean, the finals are on TV, and the game is close. We'll do it tomorrow. We know that's not right, but it happens all the time.
- How about our choice of entertainment? (entertainment!) Really, if you stop and analyze it, what business does a Christian have with watching any R-rated movies? How about most PG ones? How about those that are leading us toward secular humanism? 1 Cor. 10:31 says whatever you do, do it for God's glory....
- We could talk about the whole deal of Gay Marriage, living together, sexual immorality, pornography,
- What about this one – eating out on Sabbath. The Bible's pretty clear about this, but it's become pretty socially acceptable and we just do it. Have we really asked God about this one?

Selfish choices always lead to their own reward, spiraling out of control.

- The choice of porn has it's reward in temporary satisfaction while destroying a marriage and lives connected to it. What it worth it?
- The choice of debt – especially credit card debt – the reward is that new thing that breaks before it's paid for. But the debt load is overwhelming individuals, families and even nations. Was it worth it?
  - I have a friend that got in over his head in debt and joined in with a debt consolidation company to help him over some hurdles. It reduced

his payment and all was good, until his car didn't work any more. He told me – I'm still paying my debt on my car, and I cannot afford to get a new one....

What would our lives be like if we would get together with other believers – in a community group, in a family meeting, in an accountability group of friends – and ask God, together, for an answer to our problems? What would happen if we would lay out our options and ideas? What would happen if we compared those options with scripture? And finally, what would happen if we WAITED for an answer before we acted on major decisions?

Selfish choices always spiral out of control, but Godly choices lead to eternal rewards.

**WE:** So...the lingering question now is, but I've made selfish choices in the past. I've made some really poor choices, how do I get out of them?

1. **Take the Long Look.** Why are you making these decisions? What is the driving force in your life? Where are they taking you? How well are your decisions leading you?
  - a. This is about taking a fearless inventory of your life and choices.
  - b. <sup>24</sup>By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. <sup>25</sup>He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup>He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. <sup>14</sup>
  - c. Moses took the long look and he was way better off because of it.
  - d. Imagine being confronted with the temptation, addiction and sin of pornography. Take the long look – what are the consequences and do I really want those? Where will it lead me – is that what I really want? What do I want – family, friends, a moral life – then make different decisions.
  - e. What if I waited to buy that “widget” instead of putting it on my credit card? What would the worst thing be by waiting – oh? I won't die? Then maybe it's not going to be bad to wait.
  - f. What if I wanted to raise my kids spiritually, so instead of neglecting family worship, I prioritized my schedule around it?
  - g. What if instead of eating out on Sabbath and making others work, buying and selling, I planned ahead and made positive plans to make Sabbath a special day?
  - h. What if I changed my entertainment choices based on a Biblical world-view and values? Would it matter if my kids don't get to see the re-runs of Gilligan's island? Would it matter if we don't get to see Death Wish 13? Would it matter if they don't get to see dancing with the stars? In the long run, what do we really want?

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<sup>14</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Heb 11:24–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2. **Make Amends where you need to?** This is the same as step 8 of the 12 steps. If our choices have wronged people, as a Christian, we have an obligation to seek restitution.
3. **Shift Gears** – Begin to make right choices and make choices rightly. Ask God, ask Godly friends to pray with you about those decisions, and wait for the correct answer.
  - a. (I could tell the story of waiting on God to know whether to move my family to Washington and come to Vancouver or not – how I waited and how God led.... Unsure about this illustration, I don't want to set myself up as a great example)
4. **Understand that God doesn't give up on people** – Sometimes God even protects us in the midst of our bad decisions. Abram and Sarai's foray into Egypt and their lies there show that God was still protecting them, even though they were making selfish and poor choices.
  - a. But God always seeks to point us in the right direction. He always seeks to lead us in the direction of purity – purity of thought, purity of action, purity of decisions and choices.
  - b. No matter your past choices – God will forgive you and will encourage you to make new choices. He'll lead you on that journey.
  - c. <sup>11</sup>For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>15</sup>
  - d. <sup>14</sup>if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. <sup>16</sup>
5. **Know God's promises**
  - a. <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. <sup>17</sup>
  - b. <sup>4</sup>Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>18</sup>
  - c. <sup>17</sup>Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. <sup>19</sup>
  - d. <sup>105</sup>Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. <sup>20</sup>
  - e. It is God's promises that you put to the test and begin to see them working in your life that you begin to really grow as a Christian. God wants to do

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<sup>15</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Je 29:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>16</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (2 Ch 7:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>17</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Php 2:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>18</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Jas 1:4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>19</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Jas 1:16–17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>20</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Ps 119:105). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

good in your life, and in mine. He wants to lead us on the path to good choices and selfless choices.

Because selfish choices always spiral out of control, but Godly choices lead to eternal rewards.

**Conclusion:** Everytime the promise came to Abram, the promise of a child, Sarai was never mentioned – until the last time. God gave them exceptional assurance after this – he changed his name to Abraham – no longer exalted father, but the Father of Nations. He changed her name – no longer beautiful princess, but now the mother of the Promised Child.

They still had the baby – despite their really stupid decisions. God still remained faithful!

<sup>11</sup>The LORD said to me, “Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. <sup>12</sup>Go, proclaim this message toward the north:

“ ‘Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD,  
‘I will frown on you no longer,  
for I am faithful,’ declares the LORD,  
‘I will not be angry forever.

<sup>13</sup>Only acknowledge your guilt—  
you have rebelled against the LORD your God,  
you have scattered your favors to foreign gods  
under every spreading tree,  
and have not obeyed me,’ ”  
declares the LORD.

<sup>14</sup>“Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. <sup>21</sup>

**Story needed:** Someone who made a poor choice returning to God and how their lives were forever changed?

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<sup>21</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Je 3:11–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

**SERMON #3: Snapshots of Faith: Demas**

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Timothy 4:9-11 (Demas is in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy)

**THEME:** The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination.

**Intro:** A long time ago there was a man by the name of Robert Robinson who was riding in a stagecoach. A lady passenger was humming the hymn, “Come Though Found o Every Blessing.” The lady paused and asked if he minded the song, and what he thought of it.

His response was a very enlightening one. He said, “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years, and I would give a thousand worlds if I had them to enjoy the feelings I had then.”

Robinson wrote that hymn when he was 19, when he was saved out of sin by the preaching of George Whitefield. He became a preacher in the Methodist church, wandered to the Baptists, and eventually ended up in the Unitarian church – who deny the divinity of Christ. He understood wandering.

The third verse goes like this:

Oh to grace how great a debtor, daily I’m constrained to be, let thy goodness like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, Lord, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination.

**WE:** Does your heart ever wander?

- Does it ever wander from your school work to the open fields out the windows of the school yard?
- Have you ever wandered away from your current task to spend some time day-dreaming?
- Does it ever wander from the work to the watercooler?
- Does it ever wander from your wife to that pretty woman down the aisle in the restaurant?
- Does it ever wander in the middle of my sermons? Come on! Raise your hands! I’m paying attention! (laughter)
- Does it ever wander from God? Does it ever wander and begin to leave the God you love?

**Where are you with God right now?**

This is the third of four sermons in the series called, “Snapshots of Faith.” Today we’re talking about Demas. Who is Demas, you ask? Before we get done with this message, I think you’ll find a little more about someone who spent time wandering. He was someone who got careless about his faith and thereby walked....away....



So, as I enter into this message, ask yourself – are you wandering? Have you gotten careless?

**GOD:** Go with me to the small book, 1 chapter, of Philemon. Philemon 1:24

<sup>23</sup>Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. <sup>24</sup>And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.<sup>22</sup>

Fellow Worker – the literal translation is that he was a companion in the work. A fellow-worker with Paul in the work of the Gospel. He wasn't a tag-along, he was someone who got into the trenches with Paul on his journeys and was a along to lighten Paul's load, but also along to share in the spreading of the gospel message.

He starts out well for us. His very first entrance into the mix is a message of a strong start. We don't know much else about Demas. He is mentioned with a good start. But we don't know if he was one of Paul's converts, or whether he joined up because he wanted to be a missionary. We don't know what he did for work before this time, we don't know if he was married or single. We only know the first mention of him is a pretty good start. He was a fellow worker with God.

Big Onion – a 12 mile race. I knew that I could run a 7:30 and maintain that pace. As they marked off the first mile mark with times, I felt like I was in the back and when I went by the time keeper, he was calling out numbers. 6:05, 6:06, 6:07 and I passed by. I said, there is NO way I can maintain this pace for the next 11 miles. No way. I slowed down and let a boatload of people pass me. Clearly, I was in the back 20% of the race. They must have felt like they were starting so well. But as the race wore on and I plodded my way to the finish line. And as I did, I slowly passed people who were walking, standing on the sidelines puking their guts out, and some had slowed considerably. I ended up finishing in the top 30% of the race.

Many people are given a good start in life. But a good start in life, or even in the Christian walk doesn't mean a guaranteed strong finish. There are any number of Biblical examples of people who started well and ended poorly:

- Solomon
- King Saul
- Samson
- Annanias and Sapphira
- Plenty more....

This just really shows us well that: The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination.

How many times have we seen this in church? We see someone come to meet the Lord, have a real, full-blown conversion and they take off like they were shot from a cannon!

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<sup>22</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Phm 23–24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

But a few months later, a few years later, you can't find them. What happened?

My friend Jason was such a person. He came from a pretty rough background and began to come to church. He was eventually baptized. In that process I taught him how to play the guitar. He was a rising star – someone who challenged the whole church to memorize scripture, sing songs of praise and put away secular music of any kind. When I moved to CO, I lost track of him. He ended up in college and the last I talked to him, he had lost his faith, had begun to say no to some basic moral issues that were a key ingredient of his life before, and he was nowhere to be found. Gone.

What happens?

Key Question for you: Where are you in this spiritual journey? Are you fading after a good start? Have you forgotten that the spiritual life is a marathon, and not a 100 yard dash? We can all stumble, but will we get up and seek to finish well?

The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination.

The next mention of Demas comes in Colossians 4:14. Paul is closing out another book and he adds these words:

<sup>14</sup>Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. <sup>23</sup>

Demas was first called a fellow laborer. Now, he's just barely mentioned. Colossians wasn't written very long after Philemon – probably within the span of the same year. But now he's barely mentioned. He sends greetings. It's not "our dear friend" as in Luke's case. It's not he's wrestling in prayer for you, as in the verse above. It's, "Oh, and Demas also sends his greetings.

I read a story this week about a man who climbed up Stone Mountain in Georgia. It's a rounded top mountain and he wanted to look over the edge. So, he began to move slowly to the edge to see down. Since the top is rounded, he was too far down the face of the mountain before he realized it. When he tried to go back up, he found it too steep to climb. Too steep to climb, too steep to go down. He clung there, waiting for help, until his grip lost its strength and he fell to his death.

This mention of Demas isn't a huge problem yet. But the fact that it's just such a minimal mention signals a potential problem because of what we know about the outcome.

It seems as if he was still reporting for duty, but that his heart wasn't in it anymore. I doubt he woke up one morning and said, I'm done. Today I'm going to become a backslider! No, it was far more subtle than that, I'm sure. Perhaps he allowed himself a little slack here and there. Maybe he said, "Just this once" a couple of times and without even realizing it he was under the control of something other than the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says to guard your heart (where? Look up?). Evidently, Demas didn't do that

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<sup>23</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Col 4:13–14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

and he found out that: The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination.

Need a story about the gradual slip towards total backsliding – or some way to illustrate gradual....

Demas was really just taking the same approach that most Christian people do. It's the, "It doesn't matter" syndrome. It's the idea of getting careless in their walk.

The final mention we have of Demas comes to us in 2 Timothy 4:9-11:

<sup>9</sup>Do your best to come to me quickly, <sup>10</sup>for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup>Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. <sup>24</sup>

Luke is still with Paul. He's ever-present, ever helpful. Crescens went to Galatia to the churches – to encourage them, to help them, to strengthen them (Acts of the Apostles, p. 490). Titus to Dalmatia for the same reasons.

Notice someone else in this picture though. Paul asks Timothy to bring with him, Mark. This is the same Mark that had run away from Paul and His ministry before. He tried to travel with Barnabas and Paul, but ran home to his momma's skirt instead. (Acts 13) A couple of chapters later, Paul and Barnabas have a bit of a disagreement:

#### *Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas*

<sup>36</sup>Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

<sup>37</sup>Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, <sup>38</sup>but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. <sup>39</sup>They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, <sup>40</sup>but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup>He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. <sup>25</sup>

Paul had no vision for someone who couldn't tuck his skirt in and man-up for the work of God. If he ran away once, he'll run away again. What changed? Because now, Paul is asking for Mark to join Him, support Him – Why? Because Mark is helpful for me and my ministry, Paul says.

Mark walked away. Demas Walks away. Paul obviously, from both stories, doesn't have much time for people who walk away.

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<sup>24</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (2 Ti 4:9–11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>25</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Ac 15:36–41). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

But Mark turned back. He didn't walk away because he loved to the World. He may not have been prepared for what they faced, but a little more time under his belt, a little more support and he was ready to continue down the journey. For Mark, it was a learning experience. For Demas, he loved the World.

John 3:16:

<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.<sup>26</sup>

God's love of the world was so big that he gave himself up for it. He loved the world so much that He allowed his son, Jesus Christ to come and die here – so that we could be saved.

Demas loved the world too – but it wasn't to help the world find salvation, rather it was because he wanted to get as much out of it as he possibly could.

This is important to realize – when Paul says Demas loved the world, it wasn't because he wanted them saved. It wasn't the selfless love of God that Paul says this. Paul uses the terms deserted. He abandoned Paul. He just didn't drift away. He was someone who walked away in the very worst of moments. Paul was tired, cold, and about to go to the chopping block. Demas deserts him in the midst of his greatest need.

Why? Because he loved this world.

The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination.

<sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”<sup>27</sup>

You cannot love the world and love God. You can't do both at the same time! You cannot love this world and expect to make it to the next?

The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination.

Demas was on a downward spiral. He may not have even realized it. He got careless, but he ended turning his back on Paul, the gospel message, and fell in love with the world. He was not an innocent bystander who didn't get convinced at Paul's message. This is someone who was intimately acquainted with the gospel. He was ready for the message. He was a fellow laborer, then he barely gets mentioned, then he turns his back on it all. Why?

**WE:** That's the \$64 question isn't it? Why do people turn their back on God, having once

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<sup>26</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Jn 3:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>27</sup> *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 16:13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

known him? Why do they slip away? Why do people backslide?

Much of it, I believe, is that it has to do with carelessness.

We do it all the time. We do it in various stages of life and with various aspects of it. *We get careless with:*

- Our relationship with our spouse. And after the kids move out, you look at each other and realize that you don't know each other any more.
- With our kids, and we let the youngest ones have privileges that we would have never let the older ones have at that same age.
- With our Bible Reading – we get up late so we don't take time for it, and we skip it once this week. But that turns into 3 times next month. Pretty soon it's most of the time, and then when times are tough our carelessness comes through...
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- 
- (need more examples/illustrations of getting careless – they can pertain to the spiritual walk, or they can just be examples of careless.

So? What about you?

There was quite a mix-up at the Duke University Hospitals in Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina. Sometime in November 2004, maintenance workers had drained hydraulic fluid from the hospital elevators into empty detergent drums and then didn't get rid of the drums. Through a strange series of events, the drums were mistakenly redistributed to the people who clean surgical instruments. It took two months and 3,800 surgeries before anyone figured out something was wrong.

Washing the instruments in hydraulic fluid was not an effective means of sterilization. The biggest question is, what kind of damage has been done to the patients? No one was sure what the petroleum residue might do to people. The hospital's head honcho assured the public, "We want to give people the message that we care about our patients," and no doubt they do. But if their instruments weren't safe, they were a threat to their patients no matter how much they cared.

A church careless about holiness is like that! We may care about our people, but we're a danger to them nonetheless. It isn't enough to share the gospel with the lost; we must also be sure we act in holy ways and teach holiness as a way of life, lest we harm the people of God

I often think: "A life is like a day; it goes by so fast. If I am so careless with my days, how can I be careful with my life?" I know that somehow I have not fully come to believe that urgent things can wait while I attend to what is truly important. It finally boils down to a question of deep and strong conviction. Once I am truly convinced that preparing the heart is more important than preparing the Christmas tree I will be a lot less frustrated at the end of a day.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Henri J. M. Nouwen in the New Oxford Review (Nov. 1986). Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 18.*

The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination. So, where are you going? What direction are you walking? Are you strengthening your walk with God and taking the steps needed to keep going that direction? Or...are you getting careless?

**WE:** Sometimes, it's not because we're careless, but because we don't want to be careful.

The 20th-century ethics philosopher Mortimer Adler (who was baptized quietly at age 81) confessed to rejecting religious commitment for most of his life because it "would require a radical change in my way of life, a basic alteration in the direction of my day-to-day choices as well as in the ultimate objectives to be sought or hoped for .... The simple truth of the matter is that I did not wish to live up to being a genuinely religious person."<sup>29</sup>

And we have this amazing ability to get off track.

For some reason, human beings can't walk in a straight line. There's just something about our inner orientation that causes us to walk in a crooked or warped way. That's the conclusion of Robert Krulwich, science correspondent for NPR. In an interview on *Morning Edition*, Krulwich cites a study from Jan Souman, a scientist from Germany, who blindfolded his subjects and then asked them to walk for an hour in a straight line. Without exception, people couldn't do it. Of course everybody *thinks* they're walking in a straight line, until they remove the blindfolds and see their crooked path. Krulwich observed,

This tendency has been studied now for at least a century. We animated field tests from the 1920s, so you can literally see what happens to men who are blindfolded and told to walk across a field in a straight line, or swim across a lake in a straight line ..., and they couldn't. In the animation, you see them going in these strange loop-de-loops in either direction. Apparently, there's a profound inability in humans to [walk] straight.

According to this research, there's only one way we can walk in a straight line: by focusing on something ahead of us—like a building, a landmark, or a mountain. If we can fix our eyes on something ahead of us, we can make ourselves avoid our normal crooked course. Krulwich concludes, "Without external cues, there's apparently something in us that makes us turn [from a straight path]."<sup>30</sup>

The downward slope is gradual, and your direction always determines your destination. It's time to get on track, isn't it? It's time to stop the downward trend and begin walking the straight and narrow.

<sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. <sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *im Spiegel*, "[Unreasonable Doubt](#)," Christianity Today (2-10-11)

<sup>30</sup> Steve Inskeep, "Mystery: Why We Can't Walk Straight?" NPR: *Morning Edition* (11-22-10)

<sup>31</sup> *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Mt 7:13–14). Wheaton: Standard

**SERMON #4:** Snapshots of Faith: Matthew  
**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 5:27-32

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Bible Society.

**THEME:** Salvation and Redemptive Friendships

**Intro:** Pick up your right leg and make clockwise circles in the air. While you are doing that, take your right hand and in the air, draw the number 6. You can't keep the clockwise circles going, can you. Problem with starting like that...some of the teenage boys will do this through the entire sermon to show me it's possible after church....

**WE:** The momentum of life can really shape us. And once that momentum shapes us, it's really hard to make a change.

There are all kinds of momentum. The definition of momentum can best be seen in the idea of pushing a car that won't start. If you encounter a little rise, it's almost impossible to get it going. But imagine if just before that little rise, you are able to gather enough speed while you push that it barely even notices that little rise. That's momentum.

Momentum can also be seen as our kids begin to gather steam towards their view of life. Experts say that a child's character is pretty much formed by the time she/he is 4 years old.

Momentum can be seen in our finances as we barrel out of control in spending and debt and it just keeps stacking up upon us.

Momentum can be seen when we are driving our car and the car in front of us stops suddenly. Depending on the distance, that momentum of our car may make it very difficult to stop or impossible to stop in time.

But momentum can also affect our spiritual lives. We can create momentum that continues to take us in the the wrong direction or the right direction.

Last week we talked about Demas, in part 3 of our Snapshots of Faith series. Demas didn't make a change. Perhaps it was the momentum of his life that kept him on that downwards slope. But today, we're going to conclude the series by talking about someone who was able to see that momentum in his life stopped!

Before I get there, I want to introduce you to a few people.: (maybe, or do it later in sermon)

**GOD:** Go with me to your Bibles and let's take a look at the book of Luke 5:27

<sup>27</sup>After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, <sup>28</sup>and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Lk 5:27-28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



People get a little confused about this passage sometimes. This wasn't Jesus calling Levi-Matthew to become a disciple. That comes in chapter 6. This wasn't the calling to be a disciple, but rather this was the calling to salvation. Jesus comes up to Matthew and says simply, "Follow me."

The power of simplicity. Sometimes we think that for someone to accept Christ, they need to be in the right setting, while the organ plays "Just as I am" 42 times and the right illustration comes across from the preacher and enough prayers are prayed. But Jesus simply says, "Follow Me."

Did Matthew know about Jesus before this? Had he heard him speak before this? We don't know. We aren't given that information. All we know at this point in time is, Jesus is calling a Tax Collector.

Let me ask you, is April 15 your favorite time of the year?

In Israel, taxes weren't inconvenient, they were a reminder that they were no longer a sovereign nation. Taxes were not only a problem on the pocket book, they were a bigger issue on the national pride.

Tax collectors were considered traitors. They were the Aaron Burr's of their society. (modern hero's?)

The Romans would hire local people to collect taxes. It made the people think less of the romans, than of the hated taxman. The tax collectors were not only siding with the enemy, but they were usually cheaters – they took more than their fare share of taxes. Perhaps the system was as complicated as today's tax laws and they only one who really knew what the taxes were was the tax collector. But often, usually, the tax collector would say, I can charge 2, 3 or more times what I give to the Romans and then I can get rich.

This made the tax collector a traitor to both sides, really. He collected the taxes and made the Romans happy, but he stirred up bigger trouble for Rome because of the high cost of taxation. He wasn't making any friends on the Roman side or on the Israel side.

So, he just collected more money – if he got rich enough, perhaps he wouldn't notice how lonely he was. Perhaps he wouldn't notice that nobody liked him except the people he gave money to, spent money on, or the other tax collectors. There's a reason, that the party he throws in a little bit is mainly people who are tax collectors and "other sinners."

The momentum of life often takes us down roads we don't expect. I know a friend who was taking pre-dental in college. But the financial picture of college needed some work and he was getting married. He decided to take a year off. When he took that year off, got married, but life needed some extra help at that point in time, and then a baby came along, another one, and pretty soon, he's 50 and has never gotten back to college. He doesn't regret his life, but the momentum of life can often take you a direction you never

planned on.

Matthew was probably one of those people. He was probably raised up in a normal Jewish home. They hated the Roman occupation, but they didn't have the wherewithal to fight them off. But when life began to hit in the 20s, marriage, babies, or whatever hits, it's time to get a job and feed the family. Perhaps Matthew's story goes there.

But what is the thought process that goes through someone's head to join the enemy. Desperate for money? See's a temporary life that could make a difference in the short run? Will take a job he hates so he can get ahead.

I heard a story on the radio the other day as I was listening to Dave Ramsey. A caller called in and wanted to know if he should take a job that he loved or one that he hated? The two jobs were like this:

The one he loved would pay him enough to live on, it would allow him time for his family, and it would give him the satisfaction of doing something to make a difference that he really loved.

The one he would hate was a job that payed more than double, but he would be gone for two or three weeks at a time, but could come home for a 4-5 days without having to work periodically.

I told my wife about it. And her response was, "So, if he takes the job to make more money so his family can have all the money they want/need and they can also use that money to find someone else to be the father/husband of the home."

Maybe Matthew took the job out of necessity. But money begins to grate on you. When all you do the job for is the money, it begins to eat away at you.

But imagine too the social stigma this job must have had. Some of his friends must have been a little shocked that he took it. Some may have dropped him right away as a friend. Others more slowly drifted away. It continues on until all his old friends are gone and the only friends he has now are other tax collectors and other sinners.

What does that do to your psyche?

(needs some more info here – a transition? More on the falling of Matthew?)

Now, along comes Jesus. His simple words, "Follow Me." They are probably the strongest words in the whole Bible.

The fact that Jesus called a Tax Collector says a lot about the fact that Jesus accepted anyone. Later, when you see whom Jesus calls to be his disciples, you find Matthew the national traitor standing along-side Simon, the Zealot – the revolutionary who was willing to kill anyone who would stand in the way of getting rid of the Romans. Matthew and Simon were on opposite extremes. Simon must have hated tax collectors for collaborating with the enemy. Matthew must have disliked Simon and his counterparts for threatening his livelihood as well as his very life.

Jesus calls everyone. He leaves no one out. There must have been a sense of wonder in the eyes of Matthew that a Jew, a Rabbi, would even want him around. But if this man was really the Messiah, what would he want with the traitor?

Isn't that the story of Jesus? Isn't that the story of Jesus to accept anyone who wants to come.

Matthew 11:28-30 <sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”<sup>33</sup>

John 3:16-ff.

<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. <sup>19</sup>This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>All those who do evil hate the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But those who live by the truth come into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.<sup>34</sup>

Romans 3:23-24

<sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

Romans 6:23

<sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>36</sup>

Acts 4:12

<sup>12</sup>Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”<sup>37</sup>

No wonder Matthew followed immediately. No wonder he followed so quickly. This was

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<sup>33</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Mt 11:28–30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>34</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Jn 3:16–21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>35</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Ro 3:23–24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>36</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Ro 6:23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>37</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Ac 4:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

the first time in a long time that he found unconditional love and acceptance. This is the first time in a long that someone looked him in the eye. Look at the relief that must have brought! Look at the sense of wonder that must have brought! Look at the relief that must have brought! Look at the way this must have brought about a sense of acceptance for the first time in years.

Listen to this quote from a little book called “Ministry of Healing.”

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me."

Follow Me. Matthew Did. And he would call us today. Follow me. It's the call that many of you have felt, but have been unwilling to make that decision up to this point in time. It's that sense that you've been holding back. Jesus calls you today. Jesus calls you to be his follower. If you want to take your bulletins and make that you are accepting Christ today, and turn it in to me after the sermon, we'd be glad to talk with you. If you want to be baptized, because you hear God's call on your life today, we'd love to arrange that for you. If you'd like to see that happen, so would we. We won't twist your arm, Jesus never did. But He is calling you today!

Now, look what Matthew does immediately after this calling to be a Christian.

Luke 5:27-32

<sup>27</sup>After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, <sup>28</sup>and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

<sup>29</sup>Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. <sup>30</sup>But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>31</sup>Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>32</sup>I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."<sup>38</sup>

*(READER NOTE: Rough – I know what I'm saying – read for the story, not the exactness of the words)*

Matthew's Party

Jesus called me – what can I do? All I know how to do is collect taxes, invest my money and throw parties!

Nah! That's a wild idea! (but he couldn't shake it)

Invite my buddies from the office to a party

Jesus said yes! So did his office mates! They said they'd come.

There's Jesus talking to Joseph. James and John are having a good time with my

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<sup>38</sup> *The Holy Bible : Today's New International Version*. 2005 (Lk 5:27–32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

friend Artimas. And look, there's Andrew, he's bringing someone to meet Jesus now. Oh no! There's Peter talking to my former boss! What's Peter going to say to embarrass me?

Then in walk the religious heat!

They walk right up to John and say – “Why does your master eat with SINNERS and TAX COLLECTORS!”

Everyone stops. These people already felt the put down from church people. They lived alternative lifestyles. They didn't go to church each weekend because they were usually hung over from the night before. They didn't always do things that were socially acceptable in church circles.

And Jesus turns to them as all eyes focus on Him, the Pharisees, and Matthew – the host. What a way to ruin a good party.

Imagine with me for a moment. The Bible doesn't say this, but this is how I imagine it.

The religious people with all their pomp and ceremony turn and walk out. Jesus stands up and everyone looks at him, wondering what to do and he looks at them with a mischievous grin and says – “Party on!”

The evening wears on and almost everyone has gone home. The disciples are helping to pick up the place and Jesus sits down beside Matthew. And I think he would say, “Matthew, I love your heart! I LOVE your heart! I love it when people get creative to share the message of the messiah. I love it when people want to introduce people to the message of salvation and they don't want to keep it to themselves. I love your heart. Keep letting God lead and people will keep being introduced to the kingdom! Keep letting God use the way he's designed you. Keep going, Matthew!”

This message of Jesus is so good, we have no right to keep it to ourselves. We don't need to have polished answers, we just need to be who God created us to be. And allow him to show us who to talk with and befriend for the kingdom!

There's too much at stake to only talk about the weather. It's time we go again to share our faith.

Ideas for building these kinds of situations:

- Barbecue season – Not everyone is excited about hot dogs that come in a can, or burgers made out of carrots and beans. Gail and I say to people, “Bring whatever you want to grill and we'll provide the barbecues.”
- Canoeing, hiking, jogging, biking. Instead of only inviting people from the “holy huddle” invite a neighbor, co-worker, or someone else to go with you – and the people from church too.
  - Story of hiking with my brother's co-worker's, how it opened her up to accepting the Lord.

Three stories:

Lawn and neighbor story – not involved....

Story of FRIENDSHIP but no Redemption – Shane and Amy taking non- Christian

friends out for drinking and dancing, and the non- Christian saying, “This isn’t right....”

There MUST be a redemption factor built into any friendship.

## APPENDIX B

### Time Card

Table 1

*First Sermon Time Card*

	<b>SRM1/Wk1</b>	<b>SRM1/Wk2</b>	<b>SRM1/Wk3</b>
<b>Todd</b>	1.5	2	1
<b>Dave C</b>	2	2.5	1.75
<b>Dave A</b>		3.5	0.75
<b>Ginny</b>		10.5	1.25
<b>Danny</b>	1.5	2.25	
<b>Jeff</b>			0.75
<b>Terri</b>		0.5	0.5
<b>Gail</b>			0.5
<b>Roger</b>	3	4.5	12
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>25.75</b>	<b>18.5</b>
			52.25

Table 2

*Second Sermon Time Card*

	<b>SRM2/Wk1</b>	<b>SRM2/Wk2</b>	<b>SRM2/Wk3</b>
<b>Todd</b>	0.25	1.25	1
<b>Dave C</b>	0.25	0.75	1.25
<b>Dave A</b>	0.25	0.75	1.5
<b>Ginny</b>	0.25	4.75	3.25
<b>Danny</b>			1
<b>Jeff</b>	0.25	0.75	1
<b>Terri</b>		1	1
<b>Gail</b>		1	3
<b>Roger</b>	3	4	12.5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>4.25</b>	<b>14.25</b>	<b>25.5</b>
			44

Table 3

*Third Sermon Time Card*

	<b>SRM3/Wk1</b>	<b>SRM3/Wk2</b>	<b>SRM3/Wk3</b>
<b>Todd</b>	0.25	0.5	0.75
<b>Dave C</b>	0.25	1.5	0.75
<b>Dave A</b>	0.25	1	
<b>Ginny</b>	4	4	
<b>Danny</b>	0.25	1	0.75
<b>Jeff</b>	0.25	0.5	0.75
<b>Terri</b>	0.25	0.5	0.25
<b>Gail</b>		0.5	0.5
<b>Roger</b>	2	7	9.5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>13.25</b>
			37.25

Table 4

*Fourth Sermon Time Card*

	<b>SRM4/Wk1</b>	<b>SRM4/Wk2</b>	<b>SRM4/Wk3</b>
<b>Todd</b>	0.25	0.75	0.75
<b>Dave C</b>	0.25	1.75	1
<b>Dave A</b>	0.25	1.75	1
<b>Ginny</b>	0.25	4.75	1
<b>Danny</b>	0.25	0.75	1
<b>Jeff</b>	0.25	0.75	1
<b>Terri</b>		2	1
<b>Gail</b>	1	2	1
<b>Roger</b>	3	5	6
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>13.75</b>
			38.75



Table 5

*Average Time Card for Each Sermon*

	1st Sermon	2nd Sermon	3rd Sermon	4th Sermon	Average
<b>Todd</b>	4.5	2.5	1.5	1.75	2.5625
<b>Dave C</b>	6.25	2.25	2.5	3	3.5
<b>Dave A</b>	4.25	2.5	1.25	3	2.75
<b>Ginny</b>	11.75	8.25	8	6	8.5
<b>Danny</b>	3.75	1	2	2	2.1875
<b>Jeff</b>	0.75	2	1.5	2	1.5625
<b>Terri</b>	1	2	1	3	1.75
<b>Gail</b>	0.5	4	1	4	2.375
<b>Roger</b>	19.5	19.5	18.5	14	17.875

## APPENDIX C

### Survey Instruments

#### Survey of Preparation Team

1. What is your age?
  - a. 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56+
2. How often were you involved in the collaboration team? (*circle the number of meetings you came to.*)
  - a. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. On those weeks when you were not able to attend the meetings, did you participate in the online Huddle?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. How many weeks were you involved with the online Huddle? (*circle the number of weeks you were involved?*)
  - a. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. How many of the sermons did you listen to live, in church?
  - a. 1 2 3 4
6. How many of the sermons did you listen to online?
  - a. 1 2 3 4
7. In your opinion, were you an active participant in the process?
  - a. Very active
  - b. Somewhat active
  - c. Somewhat inactive
  - d. Not active
8. In your opinion, was the team truly collaborative?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
9. In your opinion, were the various methods of *collaboration* (*online, telephone, email, live meetings*) helpful to the process?
  - a. Very helpful
  - b. Somewhat helpful
  - c. Somewhat unhelpful
  - d. Not helpful
10. Please rate the training you received for using the online tools to be part of this team:
  - a. Very helpful
  - b. Somewhat helpful
  - c. Somewhat unhelpful
  - d. Not helpful

11. Please rate the training you received on Bible study, exegetical work to be part of this team:
- Very helpful
  - Somewhat helpful
  - Somewhat unhelpful
  - Not helpful
12. Please prioritize the list below to show where you feel you helped the most/least in the message preparation process: (*1=highest help, 6=lowest help – please score them all in order*)
- \_\_\_ Studying the passage
  - \_\_\_ Finding spoken illustrations
  - \_\_\_ Finding graphic illustrations
  - \_\_\_ Working on life-applications
  - \_\_\_ Holding Team members accountable
  - \_\_\_ Reviewing the process and sermons regularly
13. Please rate the support you received to encourage your continued input as part of the team:
- Very helpful
  - Somewhat helpful
  - Somewhat unhelpful
  - Not helpful
14. In your opinion, did you listen better to the messages because of your input?
- Yes
  - No
15. In your opinion, do you feel others considered your input valuable to the process in the group?
- Very valuable
  - Somewhat valuable
  - Somewhat not valuable
  - Not valuable
16. In your opinion, was the content of the messages more clear because of the process?
- Much more clear
  - Somewhat more clear
  - About the same
  - Somewhat less clear
  - Much less clear
17. Do you feel Pastor Roger did an adequate job of following through on the message content after all the collaboration was done?
- Very Adequate
  - Somewhat Adequate
  - Somewhat inadequate
  - Very inadequate
18. Did you receive any feedback on the messages that would say the audience saw a difference in content or clarity?
- Much positive feedback

- b. Some positive feedback
  - c. No feedback
  - d. Some negative feedback
  - e. Much negative feedback
19. Would you be willing to do this again?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Depends
20. Were you adequately thanked for your time and energy for being part of this team?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
21. On average, about how many hours did you put into each sermon each week, including the team meetings?
- a. Less than 2 hours
  - b. 2-4 hours
  - c. 4-6 hours
  - d. 6+ hours
22. If you were involved in this process, or a similar process again, would you make any changes? *(Please outline those here)*
23. In your opinion, what was the best part of being a part of this team? *(What worked? What did you like? What could you recommend? Please outline those here)*

### Team Answers To Survey

Question	Avg
What is your age?	
How often were you involved in the collaboration team?	5
On those weeks when you were not able to attend meetings, did you participate in the online Huddle?	Yes
How many weeks were you involved with the online Huddle?	3.71
How many of the sermons did you listen to live, in church?	3
How many of the sermons did you listen to online?	1
In your opinion, were you an active participant in the process?	Very or somewhat active
In your opinion, was the team truly collaborative?	Very collaborative
In your opinion, were the various methods of collaboration helpful to the process?	3.71
Please rate the training you received for using the online tools to be part of the team:	Somewhat Helpful

Please rate the training you received on Bible study, exegetical work to be part of this team:	Somewhat Helpful
Please prioritize the list below to show where you feel you helped the most/least in the message preparation process:	
Study the passage	2.71
Finding Illustrations	3.83
Finding Graphic Illustrations	3.67
Working on life applications	2.29
Holding Team accountable	5.75
Reviewing the process and sermons	2.86
Please rate the support you received to encourage your continued input as part of the team:	3.71
In your opinion, did you listen better to the messages because of your input?	Yes
In your opinion, did you feel others considered your input valuable to the process in the group?	3.57
In your opinion, was the content of the messages more clear because of the process?	4.43
Do you feel Pastor Roger did an adequate job of following through on the message content after all the collaboration was done?	3.86
Did you receive any feedback on the messages that would say the audience saw a difference in content or clarity?	3.67
Would you be willing to do this again?	Yes
Were you adequately thanked for your time and energy for being part of this team?	Yes
On average, about how many hours did you put into each sermon each week, including team meetings?	1-4 Hours per message

**Question 22: If you were involved in this process, or a similar process again, would you make any changes?**

"I think the online participants (only) lose something by not being present. I think it would be better if most could come in person most of the time. (I didn't feel as connected to their comments, and in the discussion group those comments weren't remembered or referred to much. But perhaps they were more helpful to the Pastor."

"Better structure starting out. More discussion of topics order up front."

"Hopefully study the commentaries and find more time to do this between meetings prep. Perhaps assign commentary or extra curricular reading would help minimum to do."

"1. Have the sermon done six weeks out. This would allow for more collaboration and feed back [sic] on finding graphics and other illustrations and putting PowerPoint presentation together. 2. Have different teams. Each team works on one sermon a month. 3. Delegate out specific responsibilities: two to study text, another to write outline,

another to pull together illustrations, and someone else for graphics.

"The Huddle seemed a little confusing to learn. Perhaps I'm saturated with new technology and don't want to learn anything else. I like the group discussions. We led. Input was appreciated by Roger. I think if the concept had been confirmed sooner and the outline conclusively written we could have worked better on finding illustrations."

"I would like to have seen people given certain 'homework' to get us focused a tad more. Like break things down into pieces, on small thought."

**Question 23: In your opinion, what was the best part of being a part of this team?**

"Seeing a sermon grow. Working with the various people. Studying the Bible together."

"People love to contribute to sermons. I didn't research as much because I'm so busy, but I probably enjoyed looking at the manuscript's flow and transitional points. The sermons seemed to get better each week with more confidence. I would have asked people for more illustrations because preachers tend to tell their own stories too often and they use the same type of illustrations."

"I believe the whole process worked - we studied more/learned more in prep. for sessions (grew ourselves). We added our prospective [sic] and life experiences that broadened the message."

"Being able to work from home online. Getting different ideas for the text study. Having more resourcing. Getting more involved in study during the week. Getting more feedback and ideas for him to make the concepts real and relavant [sic]."

"The initial in-person brainstorming on each new topic. Seeing how a sermon is created. Hearing the wisdom of some very wise and informed members. Q12 -- graphic illustrations and spoken illustrations, I think some division and labor here -- or see if a team member would find illustrations for one sermon each. Intro moving vignette powerful but not done in these 4."

"The brainstorming - give and take with very different backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints on the same topic."

"1. The in depth study entailed, 2. The meshing of minds and ideas in the group - playing off each other. (better than online!)" 3. Do it again for another 3 or 4 part series!"

## APPENDIX D

### Focus Group

#### **Focus Group Questions**

1. How long have you attended this church?
2. How often do you regularly attend this church?
3. Are you involved in a ministry in this church?
4. Which worship service do you attend?
5. Would you describe yourself an Active Listener or a Distracted Listener? Why?
6. Can you tell me the theme, or Sermon Titles of the last sermon series that Pastor Roger preached?
7. What did you find most memorable about this last sermon series?
8. What did you find most useful?
9. Where could it have been stronger, in your opinion?
10. How did that message series affect you personally?
11. Do you feel this sermon series was stronger, weaker, about the same as Pastor Roger's usual sermon series?
12. Has Pastor Roger's preaching had any personal effect on you?
13. Do you feel Pastor Roger is speaking in a manner that is consistent with the Bible?
14. Do you feel he's speaking truth, or is he twisting thoughts now and then?
15. Please tell me what kind of an impact the weekly sermons have on your life?
16. Do you feel Pastor Roger has improved in his speaking ability and content since when he first arrived, stayed the same, or gotten worse?

17. On a scale of 1-10, can you please rate for me, in your opinion, this last sermon series (*10=best, 1=worst*)
18. During the last three months, did you invite anyone to church to come here your pastor speak?
19. During the last three months, were you inspired to greater levels of commitment to Christ and His cause?
20. How relevant to your life is the weekly sermon time? In the last year? In the last three months? In the last month?
21. Any other relevant comments....?

### **Focus Group Notes<sup>39</sup>**

The people invited to be on the Focus Group were from a cross-range of individuals from within the congregation of the Adventist Community Church. They range in attendance tenure at this church from 50 years to a little over a year. Most of them were involved in some aspect of ministry. All of them are regular attenders at church. Young and old were invited, as well as new members and long-time members. I invited twenty people to be part of the team. The only stipulation was that they would attend a minimum of three of the four sermons and that they would be present for the actual focus group meeting. Most of them regularly attended the second service at 11:00 AM, but a couple occasionally came to our earlier, more relaxed, shorter service. At least one decided once to stay for both services to see if there was a difference in the message content and quality.

The person who led the focus group was the church's head elder. He is a man in his 50s, well respected by the congregation as a spiritual and fair leader, who teaches a

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<sup>39</sup> PLEASE NOTE: Numbers in the left-hand column represent people who spoke up. Questions are in **BOLD** and answers in normal type.



quality Sabbath School class each week. I chose him, because he knows how to draw discussion out of people and keep them talking on an issue.

On the evening of the Focus Group meeting, not everyone who said they would come did. Therefore, we ended up with nine members on the Focus Group team, plus a recording secretary and the facilitator. The recording secretary was asked not to enter into the discussion, so accurate notes could be taken. I felt that if she entered into the discussion, we might receive incomplete notes.

The people on the Focus Group had a heads up that this specific series was in regards to my Doctor of Ministry project. One of the team members actually rescheduled a speaking appointment elsewhere in our union, so he would not miss a single message. None of the regular church members/attendees was aware of this series being part of my dissertation project.

The focus group met the following week immediately after the sermon series concluded. They met for approximately an hour and a half and from the notes, as well as the report afterwards from the facilitator, it involved an open and lively discussion. The discussion flowed well and covered good ground in evaluating my strengths and weaknesses as a preacher as well as comparing and contrasting this sermon series against all others previously preached.

The focus Group met on July 8, 2011 and below is their discussion.

**How long have you attended this church?**

1 I've attended 7 years.

**How many years is that for you?**

3 About 50

2 2 ½

5 5

8 5-6

9 a little over a year

**How often or regular do you attend church?**

2 regularly. I intend to do a lot of playing and if I'm not here I'm somewhere else.

Are you in that brass quartet group? Yeah.

How about the rest? Yeah nods heads

9 Depends on the time of year

**Involved in ministry?**

2 Small group but on hiatus. We'll decide what we're going to do when those are over.

6 Elder

7 You too

3 Library and community services

9 Gone so much just do music when here. I work at union office in education so could be anywhere in the union.

**Which worship service do you attend?**

Pretty much all second.

I've often wondered why they attend one over another.

5 Some like fellowship hall better. Fewer things Lot more preprogrammed things happen.

Only been to one service in there. It was way shorter.

**Describe self as active or distracted listener?**

2 Yes. Specifically to the sermon?

I would assume so.

2 It's pretty easy to zoom in and listen to him. Easy to follow what he is saying and to absorb what talking about

When I thought about distracted listening, but personally with Roger I am active listener.

5 Also drives you into the bible and keeps concentrated on what he is saying.

Getting you involved in sermons. It's much easier to be active.

He puts his bible down. Then gets it again. Does have ability to keep you involved in what is going on.

2 He has eye contact with several people. At least 7 times during the sermon. Roger is very good at keeping you an active listener.

**How about theme of sermon titles Roger is preaching about?**

Snapshots of Faith (several)

Elijah

Demas

Sarai

Matthew (from various people)

**What did you find most memorable about these?**

**How many take notes during sermons.**

5 Demas – information limited but he was able to pull out so much about it and his falling down. How he was in the church and at the end out of the church

8 I think I like that he puts it into life practice. We can have the same choice as Matthew has.

You think about Matthew. Nobody likes him. Then there's a dinner and Jesus goes with Dinner. Who do you think Matthew invites. He invites all the other tax collectors. Whatever happens, happens. Jesus was just part of that.

**Any others stick out in mind?**

9 Not only was there a title and a character, there was also a key phrase that he kept referring back to. Sarah was spiraling out of control. Demas – where are you with God.

Demas was the downward slope is gradual.

9 He kept coming back to those.

Our walk is an uphill trip. When you fall it's uphill.

Elijah's was greatness isn't determined by choices.

**If you had to think about those sermons what was most useful for you?**

5 The things in your life you're not wanting run up the flagpole and you say wow! There is hope.

Anybody else Things that stuck out. Like Sarah's selfish choices spiral out of control. Anybody have that happen.

4 The one thing about Sarah talk was talk with God, wait on God, listen to him and wait on him. Give him the opportunity to work that. That's a novel idea in my life.

And to be able to look back on it too. You're going to look back on decisions and realize why God let things fall into place like it did. I've had a problem and I've been asking God why haven't you fixed this problem. Instead of getting frustrated. One of things need to learn in faith walk

8 I find this true not just with these sermons but many sermons. I feel like I've been introduced to Jesus. I can follow or turn back but he's there.

Servant instead of slave in Bible. (Another sermon) Roger did a good job of showing how we fit into mold and become true followers.

Anything else useful?

**Where could it have been stronger in your opinion?**

2 He's already one of the best preachers I've ever heard. I've been to lots of churches and for being able to get through without falling off or falling asleep. I have nothing to say about how could be better. I think he's pretty much got it.

9 Thought the last one with Matthew dropped really fast at the end. It wasn't brought back as well as others. In most of them put x amount of minutes and brought it back into conclusion and it came really fast. I was still expecting more, but still excellent.

**Did anybody feel like they heard something that is not right.**

7 I thought these 4 sermons were excellent and best he's done.

9 Good intro, good powerpoints, kept bringing it back to introduction. Well thought out.

8 I actually went to a first and second service. Only done one. Surprised that it wasn't word-for-word. He's not reading off a chart in the second sermon. I was surprised how he was able to change it a little bit.

According to process Roger gave, brainstormed, studied text, 30-45 mins in a focus study, discuss online, post manus online, critique it 30-45 mins. If you imagine any sermon like.

3 On Sabbath man came into library. Said our church very impressed with our pastor. He was so impressed with the sermon that he wanted DVD of all 4. He ordered 4 so he could give to other people. He was a visitor here . Only here one time.

Good.

6 I do think that the results of the presentation of those four sermons definitely indicated the greater preparation that was involved. On an ongoing basis, he is not able to spend 43 hours in preparation. He has said that.

You can hear the same subject preached by 10 diff pastors and bring out different points.

**Do you feel series was stronger or weaker or same?**

All – stronger

**Has Roger's preaching had a personal effect on you.**

3 Encouraging

8 Gives you encouragement to continue on. Unless you've been down that road, you really can't guide someone.

Good point Being a shepherd is having ability to lead.

7 I think his sermons have a lot of appeal to younger generation.

I've had 2 couples from Cedar Creek area in late 20s who've started coming here. Exactly that. They feel like he speaks to him on a basis they understand. Some pastors have specific groups they speak to. Roger seems to have ability to reach a lot more.

**Do you feel Roger speaking in manner consistent with Bible.**

5 He says am I speaking the truth?

6 One question should leave out of sermons. He should have confidence.

I see it as a way of getting approval.

9 A lot of times he wants approval and would get a response from people before he moves on.

Pastor to have feedback from congregation.

6 I do think what being said here is significant. He asks question because in some form people have it in mind. Now he says here is the question and this is the biblical answer.

A lot of people say things but don't really refer to the bible verses. Roger pulls out the verses.

8 I think you could take the same sermon and give to person who doesn't know god and say it word for word and it wouldn't have same impact because it is because of relationship that he has that impact.

**What kind of impact have the weekly sermons had on life. On day-to-day living.**

9 Encouraging. I look forward to seeing what will do the next week. It's rare that I'm here 4 weeks in a row. When Roger asked me, I hesitated because I'm gone so much. Interested to critique in a different way.

4 I think it emphasizes choices in your life. I think about when things come up, am I going to make a choice. Follow god or not. Good enhancement of that.

Roger does a good job of seeing how that relationship is with Jesus.

4 He also says it is imperative that we have it.

**How about improved speaking ability since arrived?**

6 You used word "ability." Are talking about ability in presentation or content.

Both.

6 I would like to make comments about ability. I think he could benefit from speech therapy. He speaks high and it would be healthier if he could keep it lower.

4 In speakers booth we have a hard time keeping up with him. Have to tweak it.

**How about content?**

4 I like that he's brought in the life journal. I think is great asset and imperative to our lives.

So many times we just need that constantly laid before us.

6 I do think there has been a significant change in sermon content to the better. Have own theory. Let's say it's because of his study program. I do hear a significant change over the 2 years he's been here.

9 It seemed that there was an effort made even in his speaking ability in these 4 sermons from what I've heard in past. Varied more intonation. Concerted effort to vary it in last 4 from watching from previous times. Pausing.

3-4 times paused, brought voice down and spoke more soothingly. Can make points on high side. But can also make on low side. Very well done.

**On a scale of 1-10. Rate for me in your opinion this last sermon series.**

2 Haven't heard all four yet. Do I get to vote?

Supposed to listen to them online again.

2 Didn't tell me that.

9 Best sermons heard or best he's done?

I assume it's best he's done.

4 He's done some pretty good sermons. 2 years to think back through.

Best or worst?

4 Not worst. No.  
From 1-10 what say?

6 8

4 8-9

3 I'd say that too

Average of 8.5

8 I kind of struggle. I don't see any differences from these from what he normally does. He doesn't let you settle for mediocre. Just keep striving. That's what I've heard all along about the relationship. I'd say it's the same.

9 I think Roger on whole is good preacher. With this series, everything was very intentional. Kept you engaged. It wasn't fillers or personal stories. It was very focused and you could tell because he's worked with this group and it was critiqued. Top notch. Almost exact everything he did as far as times started/ended, etc.

I'd like to personally say for me as I grow as a Christian. What is best or worst is often my problem. How many times have you heard somebody say that wasn't very good and another say That was the best.

3 Or did it fill a need you had.

That's a tough one for me to answer personally.

**During last 3 months did you invite people to come?**

8 I've invited people to go online and check it out because they missed it.

That's a great thing.

8 It's funny at our house how if somebody doesn't go to church, the other says wow! That sermon was for you. You should have gone. Now have to listen it online.

**How about during last 3 months. Feel more inspired to follow Christ in devotional life, etc.**

8 Oh yeah.

Again, the life journal thing has done a lot for people. Causes them to get into word and study for self.

4 On top of that, really enjoy the community group aspect. It's been a life saver for a lot of people. Thursdays is my CG night. I look forward to that more than anything.

8 And you know those meetings are only preparing us for end times when can't go to church anymore. Have that to follow back on.

A lot of people intimidated coming into sanctuary like this.

2 That's why we have 2 services.

**How relevant to your life is the weekly sermon time?**

5 On Sabbath if you miss coming to church just a hole in that week.

2 More and more for me a true statement.

**Next part: how relevant to life has weekly sermon time been in last year?**

5 Goes back to what are you doing. Are you coming in and just sitting in there or getting involved. If getting involved being more relevant.

I was taught. When walk thru doors what says up front are actual words of God coming to you. Preparation for that time is important. He's trying to get us prepared so we're constantly involved like that.

8 Perhaps another way to ask that question would be has your time with god increased over the last year?

4 Has it made an impact? I think that would be a good measuring tool.

2 For me being here 2 years and not "involved." My whole reason was to come and hear the sermons.

Breaks question down further. How relevant in last 3 mos and last mo? Not sure of intent but are you getting stronger

6 I think there's a comparison of these 4 sermons.

**Any other relative comments?**

5 One thing I appreciate about Roger. I have him yet to sidestep an issue that might not make him popular with congregation. He'll say it if it needs to be said. Past pastor went away for 6 mos and he had changed because of congregation. If Roger feels something needs to be said he will say it.

Specific subject. He will sermonize on that.

9 I'll read this. I feel pastor learned a variety of learning styles in his sermons (visual displays, movement, questions, text on the screen, reading texts, anagrams, etc.). He sparks every different way we learn. I think that was intentional to make a wide variety of learning styles.

2 I realize now that it's been the auditory and visual that's drawn me in. The style of presentation has definitely plus.

**Any thoughts about Roger.**

7 I have a concern about all new people join church. I feel that he speaks to them. That they can understand even babes in faith. He has words of encouragement for them.



Good point. My sister-in-law was baptized a year ago. She has made comments about that.

4 Those not new in faith also get a lot out of it. Both dynamics are being met.

8 I've heard it and seen it with many pastors. They will comment about something in sermon and he'll say I didn't say anything like that. It's the Holy Spirit that nourishes them.

Reading bible text earlier and now. Still get something out of it.

9 He brings in Spirit of Prophecy. I appreciate that.

4 On same note. I enjoy it that he brings it in, but he doesn't harp on it. It's an author I enjoy to read. The quotes are relevant.

2 There was a time when preachers didn't use EGW but now are beginning to do now.

One thing I've been blessed with is he has brought out sermons in a different way than I've thought about it before. A lot of it is how we hear things. He speaks to so many age levels, and spiritual levels in Christian walk.

8 I believe with all heart if he were to diminish from the faith we would see it immediately. That's how powerful I believe the walk he has is.

2 The health of the church is very healthy.

I don't have any other Qs specific to outline. As finish here, important as sheep of this pastor to follow the leader and speak here to let him know where he's at. A lot of pastors may not get negative comments or others try to tear them down.

2 When I first started coming here, I was looking for reason to not come back. I'm still here and I'm looking for reason to become stronger Christian.

5 At business meeting made comment about retained members. I told him afterwards that not good comment because if lost one, not good. He told him to make comment like that to him anytime because it is important.

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